

02620

epic

ILLUSTRATED

this issue:

COBALT 60
by Vaughn Bodé
Mark Bodé
& Larry Todd

and

**THE LAST
GALACTUS STORY**

plus

RELIC
by Al Williamson



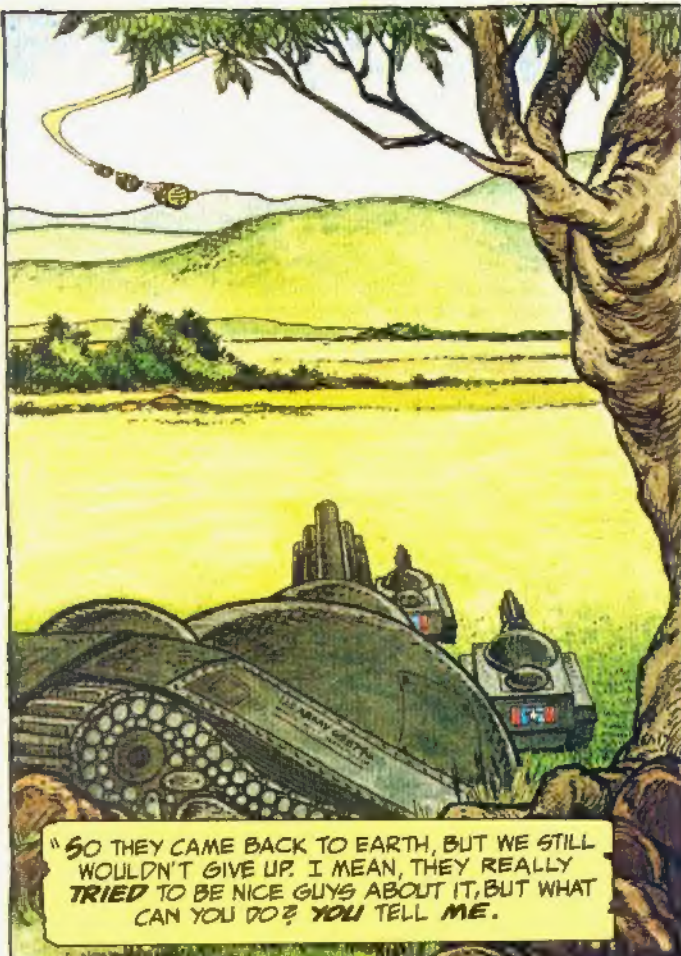
DUETT

"IT WASN'T SO BAD, REALLY, BEING CONQUERED BY THE ALIENS. I MEAN, THEY WERE PRETTY DECENT ABOUT THE WHOLE THING, WHEN YOU STOP TO THINK ABOUT IT."

"LIKE, WHEN THEY WERE GOING TO BLOW UP VENUS, TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR POWER. PEOPLE PROTESTED AND SAID HOW MUCH VENUS MEANS TO US AND EVERYTHING AND THEY LISTENED... THEY REALLY LISTENED. THEY WERE WILLING TO COMPROMISE."



"SO THEY BLEW UP MARS INSTEAD, WHICH WAS JUST A DEAD HUNK OF ROCK, ANYWAY. AND SOME PEOPLE BITCHED ABOUT THAT, TOO. SOME PEOPLE ARE NEVER SATISFIED."



"SO THEY CAME BACK TO EARTH, BUT WE STILL WOULDN'T GIVE UP. I MEAN, THEY REALLY **TRIED** TO BE NICE GUYS ABOUT IT, BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO? **YOU TELL ME.**"



"WE HIT THEM WITH EVERYTHING WE HAD, BUT IT DIDN'T DO ANY GOOD. IT WAS LIKE OUT OF **WAR OF THE WORLDS**, YOU KNOW? THEY DIDN'T BAT AN EYE."



"WE COULD'VE SAVED A LOT OF MONEY IF SOMEBODY LIKE THE PRESIDENT HAD JUST SEEN THAT MOVIE. EVEN THE NUKES DIDN'T DO ANY GOOD. I DON'T THINK ANYBODY REALLY EXPECTED THEM TO, BUT I SUPPOSE WE HAD TO GIVE IT OUR BEST SHOT."



"I DON'T KNOW IF THEY EVEN FIRED A SHOT... THE ALIENS, I MEAN. SEEMS LIKE WE DID ALL THE BLOWING STUFF UP. THEY MADE US GET RID OF ALL OUR NUCLEAR WEAPONS FIRST THING WHEN WE SIGNED THE PEACE TREATY."

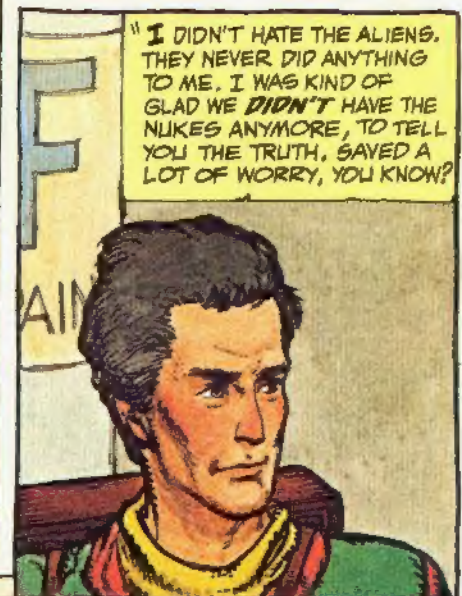


"EVERYBODY SIGNED BUT THE ARABS AND SUCH, AND FINALLY THE ALIENS HAD TO DO SOMETHING DRASTIC. THE MIDDLE EAST WAS CALLED 'THE GREAT PIT' AFTER THAT, BUT EVERYTHING ELSE STAYED PRETTY MUCH THE SAME.

"THE GOVERNMENTS WERE STILL THE SAME, THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM... THERE WAS STILL THE SAME OLD CRAP ON TELEVISION. THE ALIENS HAD THE LAST WORD ON EVERYTHING BUT THEY DIDN'T REALLY MESS IN OUR PERSONAL BUSINESS MUCH, NOT ENOUGH TO DO ANY GOOD.



"WE STILL HAD CRIME AND POVERTY AND ALL THAT, JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS. IT WAS STILL TOUGH TO MAKE A LIVING PLAYING THE AUTOHARP. SOME THINGS'LL NEVER CHANGE.



"I DIDN'T HATE THE ALIENS. THEY NEVER DID ANYTHING TO ME. I WAS KIND OF GLAD WE *DIDN'T* HAVE THE NUKES ANYMORE, TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH. SAVED A LOT OF WORRY, YOU KNOW?

"THAT'S WHY IT BURNED ME TO SEE THEM BEATING ON THE ALIEN IN THE SUBWAY. HE WAS MINDING HIS OWN BUSINESS AND EVERYTHING, SO WHY'D THEY HAVE TO DO THAT? PEOPLE CAN BE REAL CREEPY SOMETIMES.



"THEY RAN OFF, AND I JUST FOLLOWED AN IMPULSE TO RUN UP AND SEE IF THERE WAS ANYTHING I COULD DO. I DO THAT A LOT... FOLLOW MY IMPULSES, I MEAN."



"I COULD SEE HE WAS IN TROUBLE. THEIR SHIPS CAN TAKE IT BUT, BOY, THE ALIENS THEMSELVES WEREN'T SO TOUGH. I THOUGHT AGAIN, THAT IT WAS JUST LIKE THE MOVIE."



"I HELPED HIM SIT UP SINCE THAT'S WHAT HE SEEMED TO WANT TO DO. HE WAS SAYING SOMETHING BUT I COULDN'T HEAR WHAT IT WAS, SO I LEANED IN REAL CLOSE."



"DON'T... GO. PLEASE..."

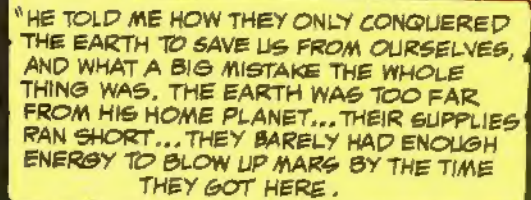


"I JUST SAT THERE FOR AWHILE AND HE SEEMED TO GET STRONGER, BUT STILL WASN'T IN ANY GREAT SHAPE, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. PRETTY SOON HE STARTED TALKING AGAIN."

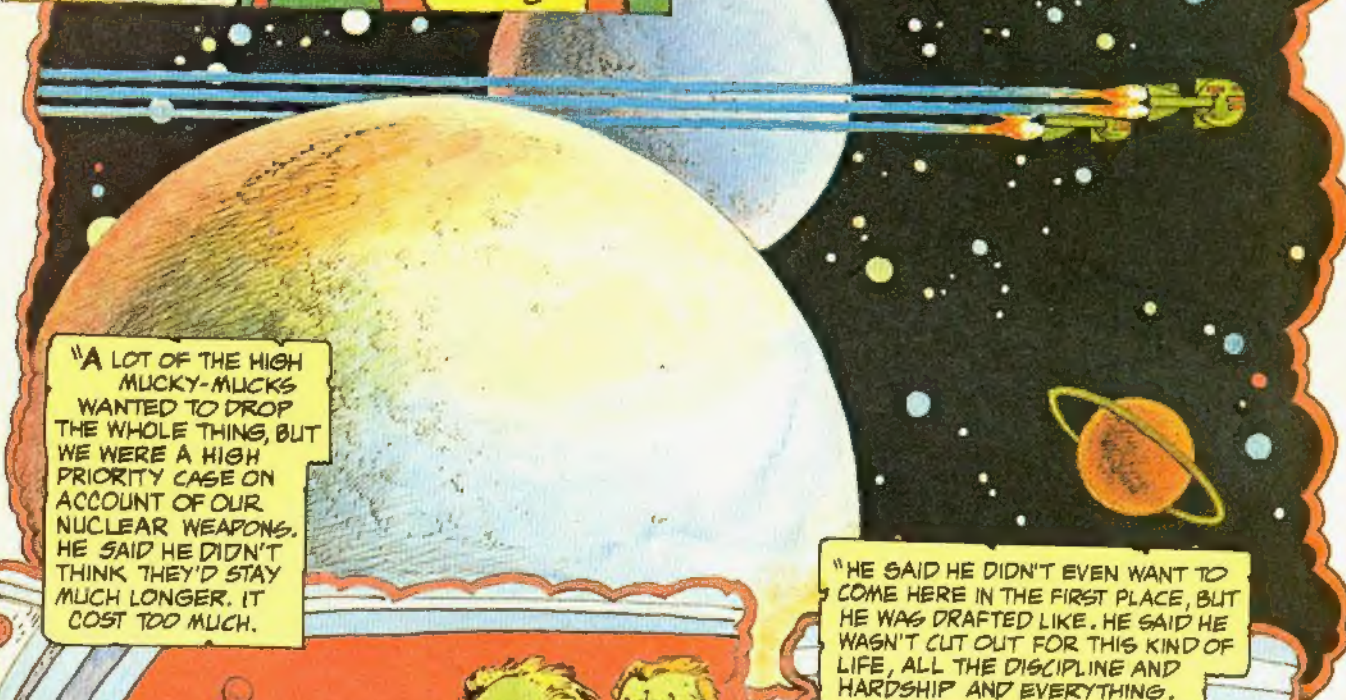




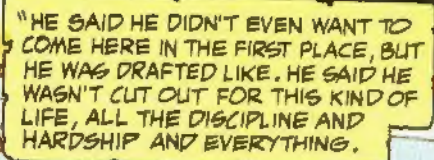
"HE TALKED REAL DULL, YOU KNOW, LIKE MAYBE HE WAS FEVERISH OR SOMETHING, RUNNING HIS WORDS ALL TOGETHER SO IT GAVE ME LIKE A HEADACHE TO LISTEN TO HIM, BUT I COULDN'T HELP IT. I GUESS I WAS FASCINATED OR SOMETHING."



"HE TOLD ME HOW THEY ONLY CONQUERED THE EARTH TO SAVE US FROM OURSELVES, AND WHAT A BIG MISTAKE THE WHOLE THING WAS. THE EARTH WAS TOO FAR FROM HIS HOME PLANET...THEIR SUPPLIES RAN SHORT...THEY BARELY HAD ENOUGH ENERGY TO BLOW UP MARS BY THE TIME THEY GOT HERE."



"A LOT OF THE HIGH MUCKY-MUCKS WANTED TO DROP THE WHOLE THING, BUT WE WERE A HIGH PRIORITY CASE ON ACCOUNT OF OUR NUCLEAR WEAPONS. HE SAID HE DIDN'T THINK THEY'D STAY MUCH LONGER. IT COST TOO MUCH."



"HE SAID HE DIDN'T EVEN WANT TO COME HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE, BUT HE WAS DRAFTED LIKE. HE SAID HE WASN'T CUT OUT FOR THIS KIND OF LIFE, ALL THE DISCIPLINE AND HARDSHIP AND EVERYTHING."





"I ASKED HIM WHAT HE DID BACK HOME AND HE SAID HE'D SHOW ME AND, BOY, WAS I SORRY. I THOUGHT IT WAS GOING TO KILL HIM, JUST REACHING UNDER HIS COAT LIKE THAT. BUT HE WANTED TO DO IT."



"I ABOUT DIED WHEN HE SAID HE WAS A MUSICIAN. I MEAN, THAT PUT US ON COMMON GROUND RIGHT AWAY."



"IT WASN'T MUCH, REALLY, SOME KIND OF FLUTE. IT WASN'T LIKE A REAL INSTRUMENT... MORE LIKE A HARMONICA OR SOMETHING. SOMETHING YOU COULD CARRY AROUND WITH YOU."



"I SHOWED HIM MY HARP AND HE SEEMED REAL AMAZED, LIKE IT WAS A MIRACLE OR SOME-THING A SAVAGE LIKE ME COULD PLAY SOME-THING LIKE THAT."



"I SHOULD'VE KNOWN HE'D ASK FOR A TUNE."

"I GAVE HIM 'JESU, JOY OF MAN'S DESIRING.' I FIGURED WHAT-THE-HELL, EVERYBODY LIKES BACH. THEN I JUST STARTED PLAYING WHAT-EVER CAME INTO MY HEAD. I DO THAT A LOT.

"BEFORE I KNEW IT HE WAS PLAYING ALONG, KEEPING UP REAL GOOD, TOO. GOD, I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE GOT THE WIND. A MINUTE AGO I THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO DIE.



"I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT SOUNDED LIKE, BUT IT MUST HAVE BEEN PRETTY WEIRD, I MEAN, LOOKING AT US AND ALL. I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE PLAYED--MAYBE TEN MINUTES, MAYBE HALF AN HOUR. I LOST TRACK.

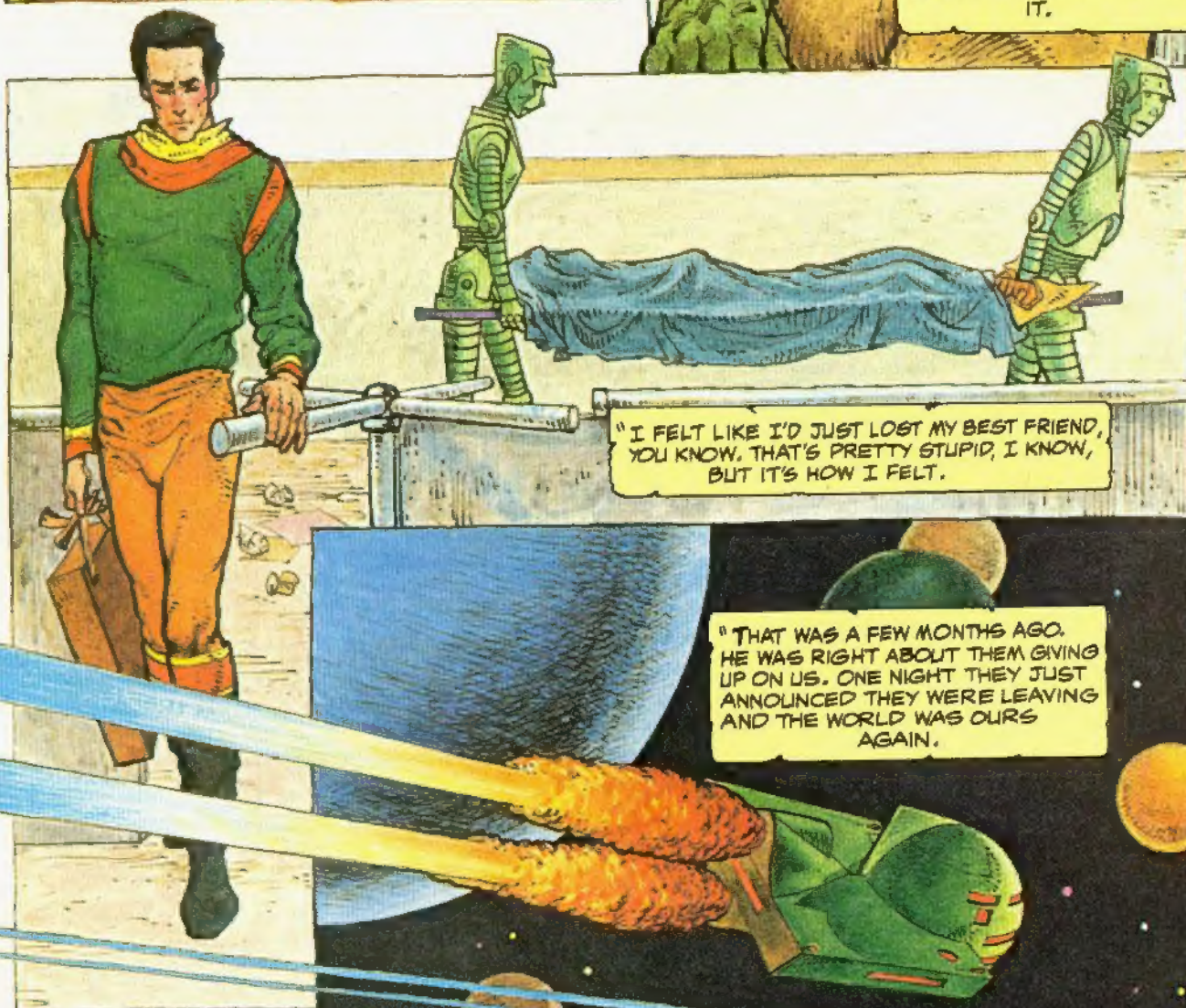
"I COULDN'T GET OVER IT. THIS GUY WAS REALLY GOOD, YOU KNOW, ESPECIALLY FOR AN ALIEN WHO WAS DYING AND EVERYTHING. HE KEPT RIGHT UP.



"I PLAYED FOR ALL I WAS WORTH, KIND OF PLAYING OFF THAT FLUTE OF HIS. I FELT LIKE I WAS FLOATING OUT IN SPACE, FLOATING ON THE MUSIC.



"AND THEN I NOTICED THAT I WAS PLAYING ALONE. I GUESS HE PUT ALL HE HAD INTO THAT DUET. I FELT REAL SORRY FOR HIM, DYING LIKE THAT, IN A GODDAM SUBWAY ABOUT A ZILLION MILES FROM HOME. IT WAS REAL SAD, WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT.



"I FELT LIKE I'D JUST LOST MY BEST FRIEND, YOU KNOW. THAT'S PRETTY STUPID, I KNOW, BUT IT'S HOW I FELT.

"THAT WAS A FEW MONTHS AGO. HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THEM GIVING UP ON US. ONE NIGHT THEY JUST ANNOUNCED THEY WERE LEAVING AND THE WORLD WAS OURS AGAIN.

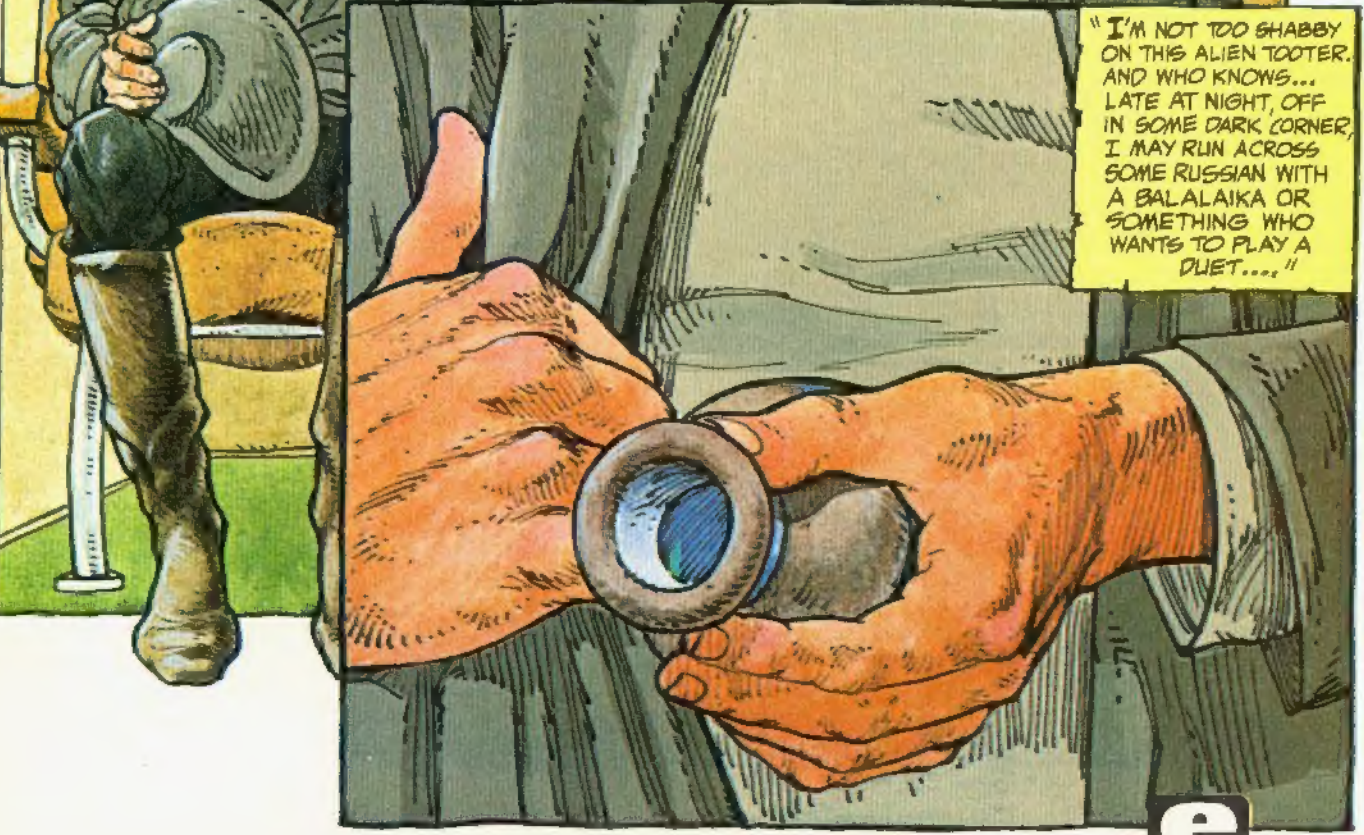


"NOW I'M IN THE ALIEN'S SHOES. NOT LITERALLY, YOU UNDERSTAND, BUT I MEAN I GOT DRAFTED. YEAH, ME. WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT IT?"

"ANYHOW, THEY'RE SHIPPING US OUT TO THE GREAT PIT TO FIGHT THE RUSSIANS OVER OIL RIGHTS. I DON'T KNOW WHY WE HAVE TO DO IT. I'VE GOT NOTHING AGAINST ANY RUSSIAN WHO'S EVER BEEN BORN."



"WHY DO PEOPLE PUT UP WITH THIS CRAP? I'LL GO, BUT I'M GOING PREPARED, EVEN IF THEY WON'T LET ME TAKE MY HARP."



"I'M NOT TOO SHABBY ON THIS ALIEN TOOTER. AND WHO KNOWS... LATE AT NIGHT, OFF IN SOME DARK CORNER, I MAY RUN ACROSS SOME RUSSIAN WITH A BALALAIKA OR SOMETHING WHO WANTS TO PLAY A DUET...."

SERGIO ARAGONÉS

GROO

THE WANDERER

BY
SERGIO ARAGONÉS

LETTERS
STAN SAKAI

COLORS
TOM LUTH

VERBALIST
MARK EVANIER

The one victorious
in battle is the
smartest, strongest
warrior.

There are, however,
the occasional
exceptions...

HERE IS GROO
IN HIS NATURAL
HABITAT--THE
FRAY!

WE ARE
VICTORIOUS!

...AND
WE
WON,
TOO!

WITH THE MERCOS ANNIHILATED,
WE HAVE BUT TO SETTLE WARS
WITH THE KALELI TRIBE! WE
WILL SEND A MESSENGER
WITH A MESSAGE OF PEACE!

WHO IS
TOTALLY
EXPENDABLE?

OH,
GROO!

"KALELIS--
OUR PEOPLE
WISH ONLY
PEACE. OUR
MESSENGER
SHALL
CONVEY OUR
INTENTIONS."

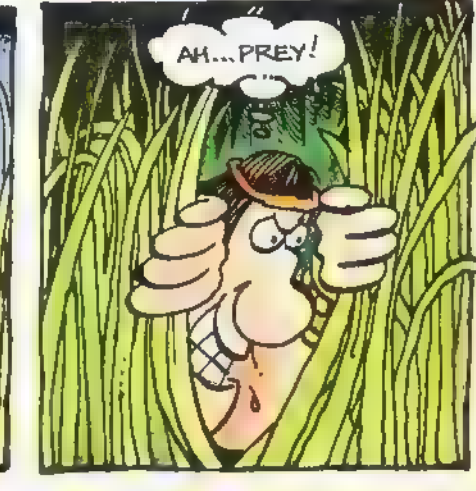
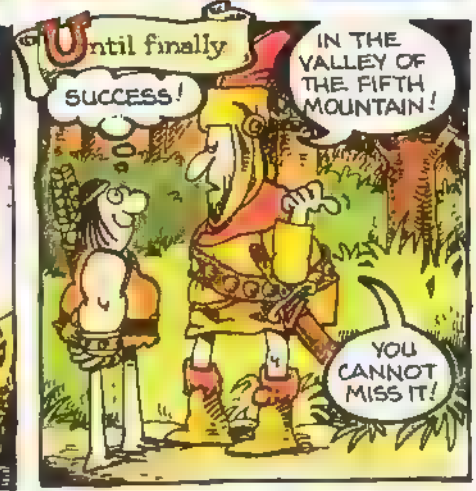
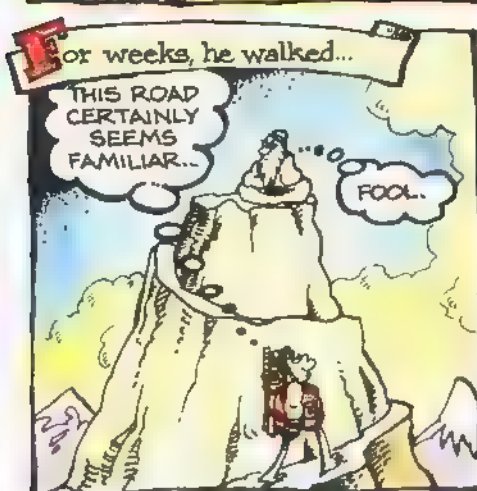
GROO! DELIVER
THESE WORDS OF
PEACE TO THE
KALELIS--

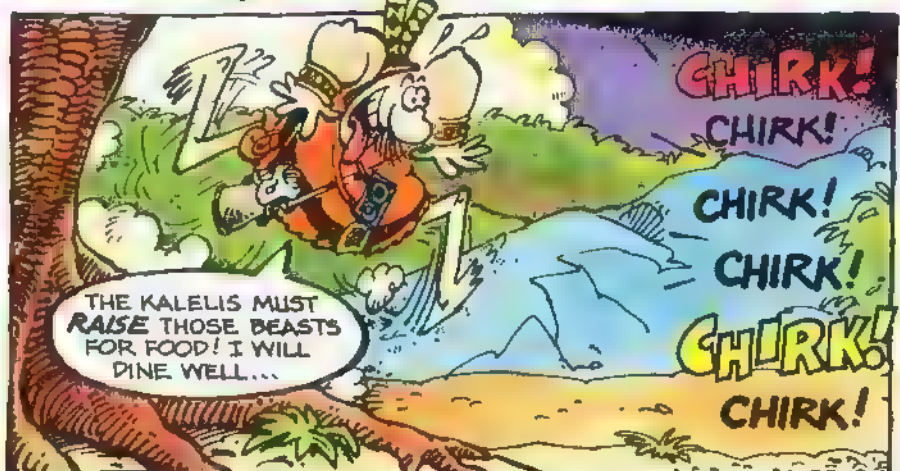
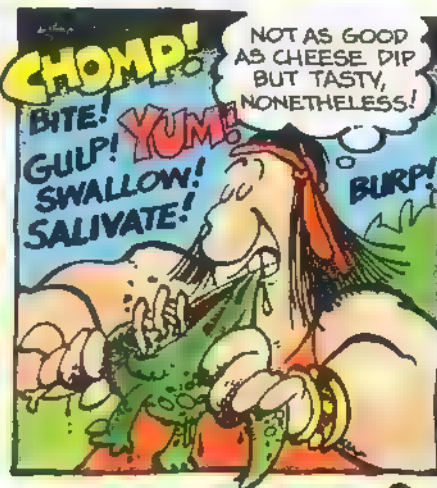
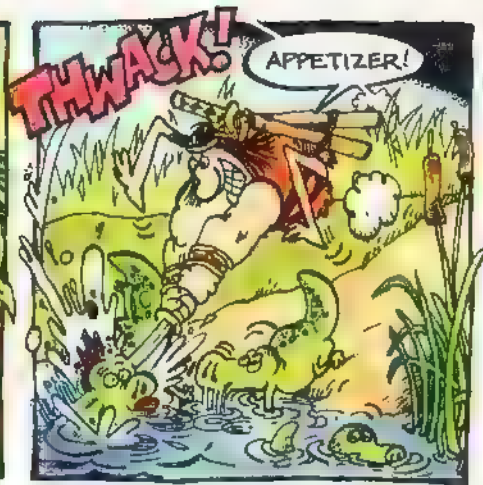
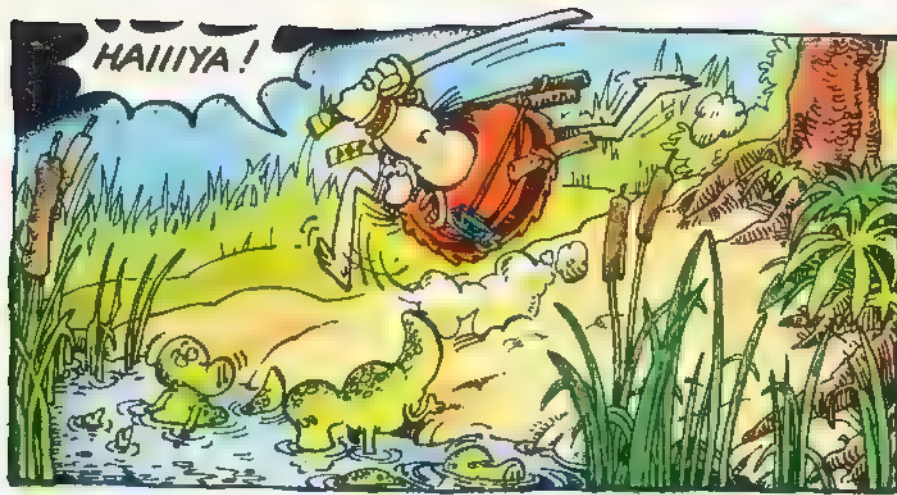
...AND DO
TRY NOT TO
KILL ANY
OF THEM.

IT IS GOOD
AS DONE!

GROO IS
EVER OFF!

I HAVE NEVER ENCOUNTERED
THE KALELIS! I HOPE I CAN
FIND THEIR VILLAGE!







CHIRK!
CHIRK!

CHIRK!

CHIRK! CHIRK!
SLAY THE FILTHY
CANNIBAL WHO ATE
HYOO! AND LYOO!
CHIRK!!

CHIRK?

CHIRK
CHIRK!

WHY DO I
HAVE THE FEELING
THAT MY
MESSAGE OF
PEACE WILL
NOT GO
OVER BIG?

CHIRK
CHIRK
CHIRK!

CHIRK!

CHIRK
CHIRK
CHIRK
CHIRK!

CHIRK?

CHIRK!

CHIRK
CHIRK!

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THE
END

ARAGONE'S



CLOSE RANKS PREPARE
TO ENGAGE ENEMY, ONE
OH FOUR, ON MY
COMMAND.

WITH THE TURN OF THE GREAT, NEW CENTURY, THE SUPER POWERS WERE STILL STALEMATED. QUARRELS BETWEEN SMALLER COUNTRIES WERE SQUELCHED BY THE MANIPULATIONS OF LARGE CORPORATIONS WHICH HAD BECOME RIVALING SUPER POWERS THEMSELVES: M.DONNEL, THE FAST FOOD KING WHICH LITERALLY CONTROLLED THE WORLD'S FOOD SUPPLY; C.V., THE FRENCH ENERGY GIANT WITH A STEEL GRIP ON AFRICA AND ALL OF FREE EUROPE; N.T.A., THE SAUDI-ARABIAN CONGLOM WHICH WAS VIRTUALLY THE EARTH'S REALTOR; AND SON-E, THE JAPANESE ENGINEERING MONSTER THAT MADE EVERYTHING FROM DIGITAL WATCHES TO SPACE SHUTTLES. THESE CORPORATIONS BEGAN CLASHING FOR CONTROL OF EVERY OTHER KNOWN INDUSTRY. IN THIS CLASH FOR TOTAL POWER A NEW PLANE WAS FORMED TO WAGE WAR.

AND BLOODY WARS THEY WERE.

CORPORATE WARS



THE ENEMY FIELD MARSHALL
SHOUTED LOUD AND CLEAR.

LEFT FLANK
ADVANCE!



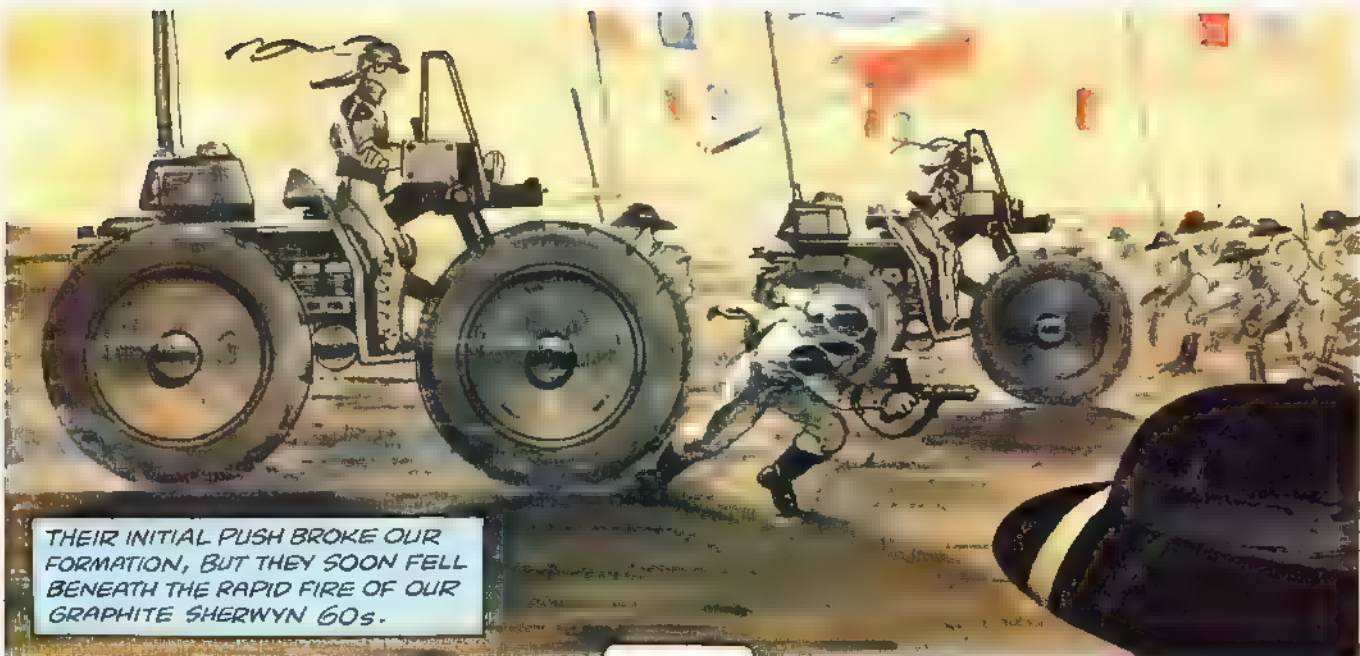
WE KNEW THOSE CAMERAS WERE ROLLING
AND WERE AWARE OF THE DEMAND TO
MAKE A GOOD SHOW OF IT.

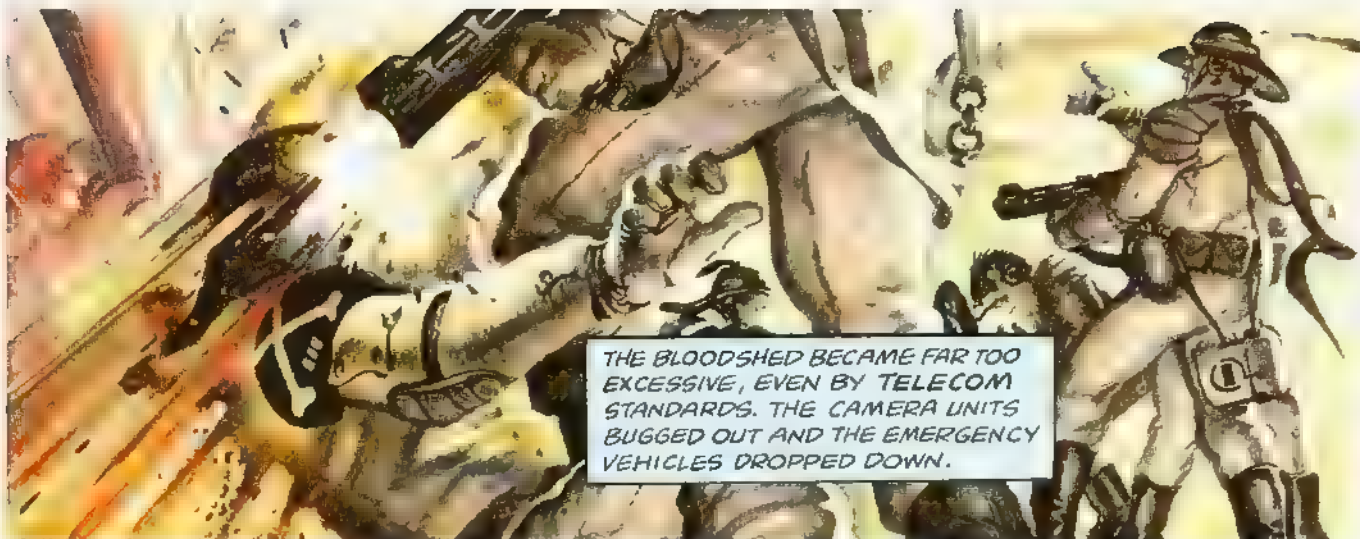


MON
DIEU...



THEY RUSHED US.





THE BLOODSHED BECAME FAR TOO EXCESSIVE, EVEN BY TELECOM STANDARDS. THE CAMERA UNITS BUGGED OUT AND THE EMERGENCY VEHICLES DROPPED DOWN.

THE LAST BATTLE OF THE SERIES WAS OVER. M.DONNEL HAD LOST TO C.V. MIRACULOUSLY, I HAD SURVIVED IT. MY CONTRACT WITH C.V. WAS MET OUT AND I WAS GLAD . WITH GOOD REASON.



NOW MAYBE THE WORLD AND MY LITTLE CORNER OF IT WOULD GET SOME DECENT FOOD.

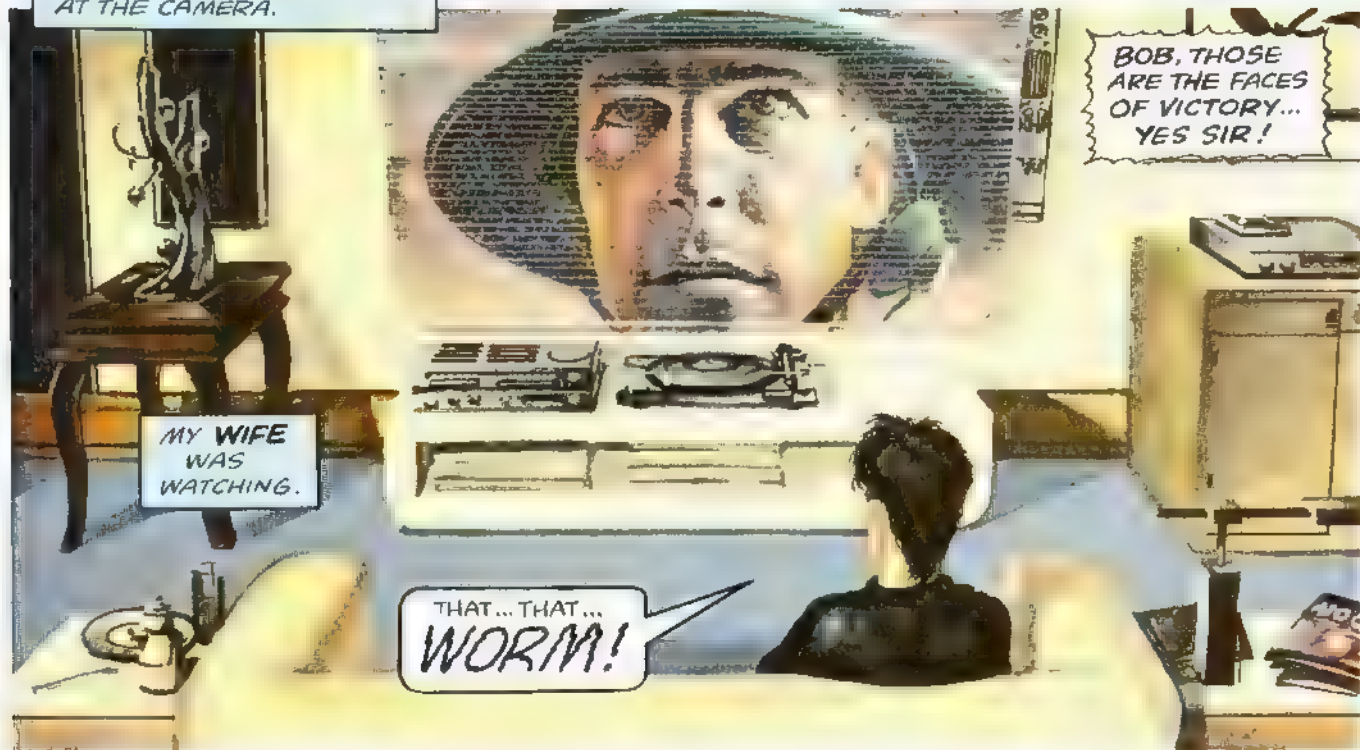
THE HANDFUL OF SURVIVORS, MYSELF INCLUDED, WERE INSTANT TELECOM HEROES. FOR THAT REASON, I DIDN'T SMILE, WAVE, OR EVEN LOOK AT THE CAMERA.



BOB, THOSE ARE THE FACES OF VICTORY... YES SIR!

MY WIFE WAS WATCHING.

THAT... THAT...
WORM!

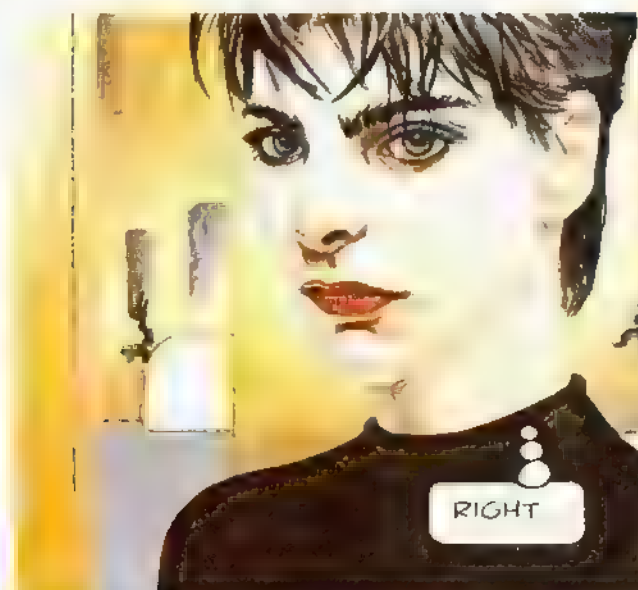




ALL THIS TIME !
HE LIED, TOLD
ME HE WAS
WORKING WITH
HIS BROTHER...
AT TELECOM !



...STAY TUNED
FOR THE WILD,
MADCAP SEX
ADVENTURES OF
MISSYMEG!



MY WIFE : SMART GIRL. BUT
LACKING MOTIVATION, SHE
NEVER QUITE REALIZED
HER POTENTIAL. SHELTERED,
PAMPERED, LAZY, SHE WAS
CONTENT WITH SITTING
HOME, WATCHING TELECOM.
AND EATING JUNK FOOD.
SHE WAS WHOLLY
AMERICAN.

RIGHT

SHE COULDN'T SHARE OR UNDERSTAND MY RADICAL IDEALOGICAL VIEWS,
NOR MY YEARNING FOR EXCITEMENT AND ADVENTURE.



BOB, LET'S SEE
THAT REPLAY!

WOW!

SHE LOATHED
CHANGE.

DAMN!

I IMAGINED HER FACING THE
ENEMY, THAT DARK, DISMAL
OVEN; SEEING HERSELF
LEARNING HOW TO USE IT
AMIDST A MIASMA OF COOK
BOOKS, FLOURED BAKE TINS,
AND MOUNTAINS OF
UNWASHED COOKERY.

THE CONTEMPLATION OF IT PROPELLING
HER INTO AN ABSOLUTE MAELSTROM
OF ANXIETY.

SHE KNEW WHAT C.V.'S
VICTORY MEANT.
M. DONNEL GOING
UNDER IN THE
FOOD EXCHANGE.

M. DONNEL'S FOOD WAS
PROMOTED AND SOLD TO
THE MASSES BY TELECOM.
99% OF ALL CONSUMER
GOODS WERE SOLD THIS
WAY. THE ADS FLASHED,
YOU SELECTED BY GRID,
AND THE CREDIT WAS
TAKEN FROM YOUR
TELECOM ACCOUNT.

TELECOM RAPED MY WIFE'S MIND DAILY AND SHE LOVED IT. SHE WAS PART OF THIS LOVE TRIANGLE. SHE LOVED TELECOM; SHE ALSO LOVED M. DONNEL. M. DONNEL LOVED TELECOM AND TELECOM LOVED M. DONNEL BACK. TOGETHER, TELECOM AND M. DONNEL COULDN'T GIVE A FUCK ABOUT HER.

SHE WAS JUST
AN ALEWIFE
TO THEM.

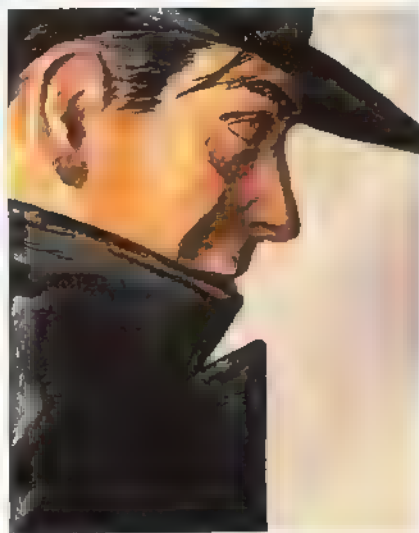
SHE SAW ME
AS A HOME-
WRECKER
TYPE.

C.V.'S INTENTION WAS TO BLAST M.DONNEL RIGHT OUT OF THE WATER, TO SELL FOOD WITH MORE SUBSTANCE, LESS PRE-
PREPARATION, LESS HYPE.
C.V. WAS GOING TO SELL FOOD
PRODUCTS TO THE ELITE
DIRECTLY THROUGH TELECOM
AND CURTAIL M.DONNEL'S
COZY LITTLE MONOPOLY.

C.V.'S POLICY MAINTAINED THAT
THE WORLD POPULATION BE
RE-EDUCATED IN HOME
FOOD PREPARATION, FORCING
A RETURN TO CLASSICAL
CUISINE.

C.V. WAS GOING TO FORCE
MY WIFE TO COOK.

I WONDER WHAT'S
FOR DINNER?



THE DOOR EXPLODED
OPEN BEFORE MY
KEY COULD EVEN
TOUCH THE LOCK.



I HOPE YOU'RE SATISFIED!



OVER DINNER WE WATCHED,
IN HEAVY SILENCE, THE REPLAYS
OF THE CONFRONTATION.
THEY WERE INTERCUT WITH
SPOTS FROM BOTH
C.V. AND M. DONNEL.

TRY NEW
FRAN-CHOOSIES!
A TASTE OF GAY
PARIS ... OUI!

M. DONNEL'S HAS A DINNER
THAT'S JUST FAB! IT'S FAB,
IT'S FAB, IT'S **DUM-DA-DUM**!
PRE-FAB!

-- GOURMET STYLE
DISHS FROM
M. DONNEL! THE
TASTE SENSATION
THAT'S SWEEPING
THE N--

-- CREPÉ SUZETTE,
COQ AU VIN! YOU,
TOO, WILL SAY:
VIVE LA FRANCE!

THE C.V. FOOD SPOTS MADE MY
MOUTH WATER. I COULDN'T
WAIT UNTIL THE OPTION
CAME UP ON MY
TELECOM GRID..

...I WAS ELATED. I HAD FOUGHT
FOR SOMETHING I BELIEVED IN
AND COULD SEE THE FRUIT OF MY
LABOR FLASHING ON THE SCREEN.

SOON I WOULD TOUCH THEM..

...TASTE THEM!

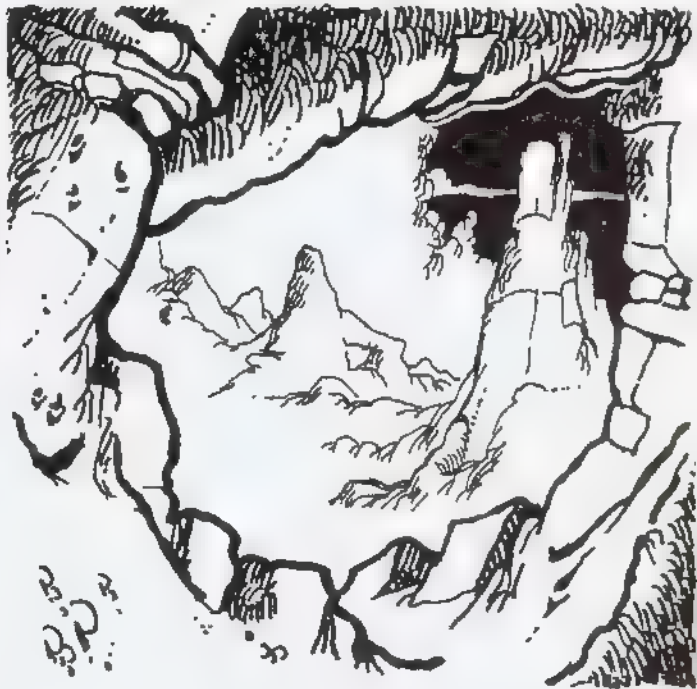
SOON I COULD FORGET
SOY-BASED M. DONNEL
CRAP AND SWITCH TO
SOMETHING FAR
SUPERIOR. C.V. KELP
PROTEINS! LIFE WAS
GOOD



IN THE LATE AFTERNOON, A LIGHT BREEZE COMES DOWN OVER THE HIGH MOUNTAINS AND ENDLESS CANYONS. THE BREEZE HISSES THE SAND OVER GREAT, WIND-ERODED ROCKS AND DUMPS IT LIKE FRAIL DREAMS AND SAD WHISPERS OVER AGES-OLD TIRED FORMATIONS OF STONE... IT IS A QUITE, DEATHLESS, TIMELESS WORLD..... IT IS, OUR FUTURE.....



YOU KNOW, WE SPECULATE, WE TRY TO OUTGUESS THE UNPREDICTABLE WHIMS OF NATURE AND WE ARE SELDOM RIGHT. BUT, WE CAN GUESS WITH UNERRING ACCURACY, THE FUTURE OF HOMO SAPIENS. THAT CREATURE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HIMSELF!.. MAN, IS THE GREAT DESTROYER, THE INSATIABLE TAKER. MAN, WILL BLOW HIMSELF UP AND LEAVE A WORLD STERILIZED BY HIS GENIUS



BUT, MAN, OR WHAT THE RADIATION AND THE CONSTANT HOT RAINS AND HIGH ROENTGEN DUST STORMS MAKE HIM, WILL STILL CLING TENACIOUSLY TO HIS QUESTIONABLE RIGHT TO SURVIVE..... HIS INALIENABLE RIGHT TO CONTINUE STRIPPING HIS RAPED WORLD.....



IN THE LATE AFTERNOON, WHEN THE LIGHT BREEZE BLOWS THE HISsing SAND, A FORM, A CREATURE, AN UGLY VERSION OF A ONCE-MAN, PADS ACROSS THE WARM SAND..... HE IS A MUTATION BELONGING, LIKE AN ANIMAL, TO THE 'RADIOS'. A REMNANT OF LONG PAST CIVILIZATIONS... HE IS A LOPER, A RADIO CONTROLLED LOPER, SCOUTING AHEAD OF A RADIO TRANSPORT....





THE LOPER IS LEFT TO LAY AND ROT QUIETLY IN THE COZY CREEK BED....HE IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE NOW. HE WILL ROT OR BE EATEN BY SOME STARVING MUTATION...IT DOESN'T MATTER...WE FOLLOW HIS KILLER, A SLIGHTLY BUILT MAN-LIKE CREATURE WHO WEARS THE NOT UNCOMMON 'WHITE CLOTH' TO HIDE HIS UGLY DEFORMITY...HE CLIMBS UP THE CRUMBLING HILL FEELING A DEEPNESS, A HEAVYNESS OF PURPOSE THAT OVER SHADOWS THE RIGHT OR WRONG OF MURDER...HIS RIDING ANIMAL, A GRASSER, MUNCHES ON DUST WEED.. IT WATCHES THE LITTLE MASTER WITH UNCONCERN..THE MAN-CREATURE PULLS THE GRASSER TO ITS KNEES AND MOUNTS THE CREEKY LEATHER SADDLE..HE SHOVES HIS WOLF CARBINE INTO THE SADDLE SCABBARD, DRAWS HARD WITH THE REINS, KICKING THE DUMB BEAST UP ON ITS FEET....THE GRASSER MOVES OFF WITH A SLOW, DELIBERATE STRIDE, ROCKING OR WADDLING ALONG NARROW PATHS HIGH ABOVE THE CANYON FLOOR.....

THIS BEGINS IT, THIS STARTS THE PROPHECY OF THE FUTURE, THE HISSING SAND, AND THE LONELY FIGURE HIGH ATOP A PLAINS BEAST...THIS IS WHERE I BEGIN THE UNIQUE STORY OF THE LITTLE MAN-CREATURE WHO IS KNOWN TO A FEW MUTATIONS, TO A FEW ANIMALS, TO A FEW FLYING THINGS AS:

COBALT 60

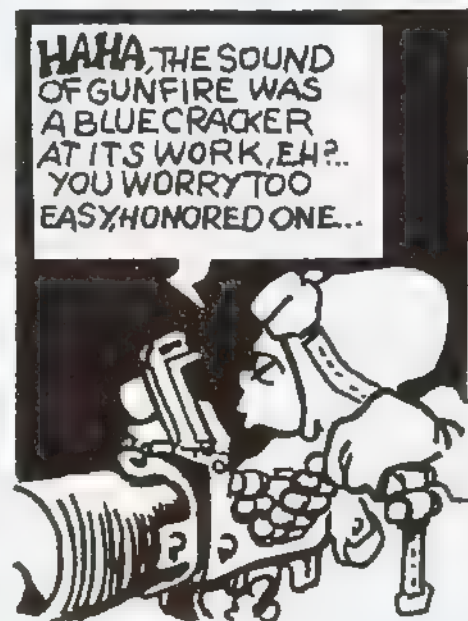
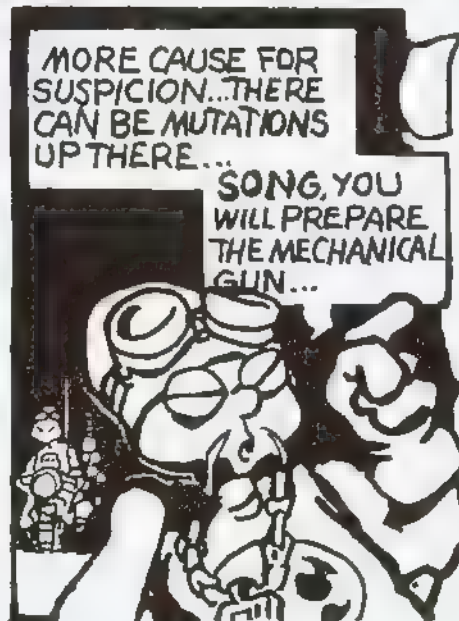
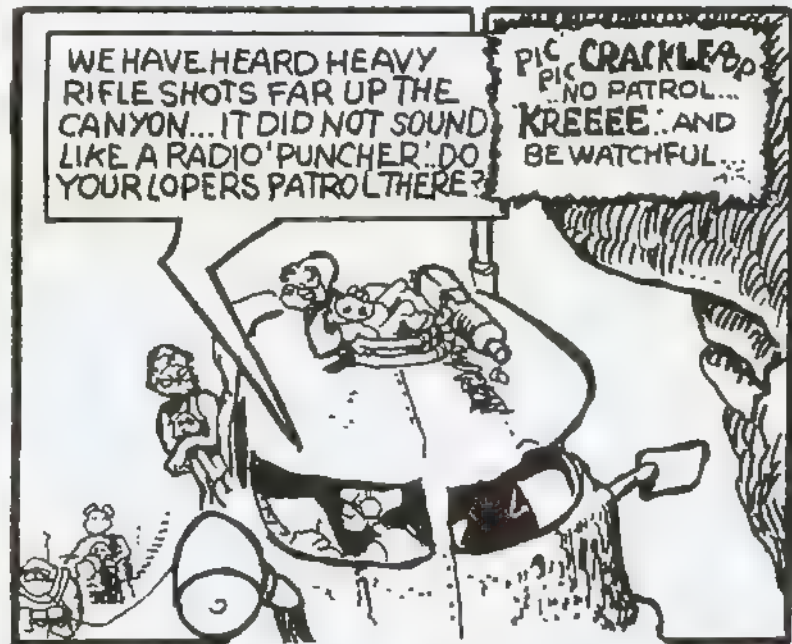
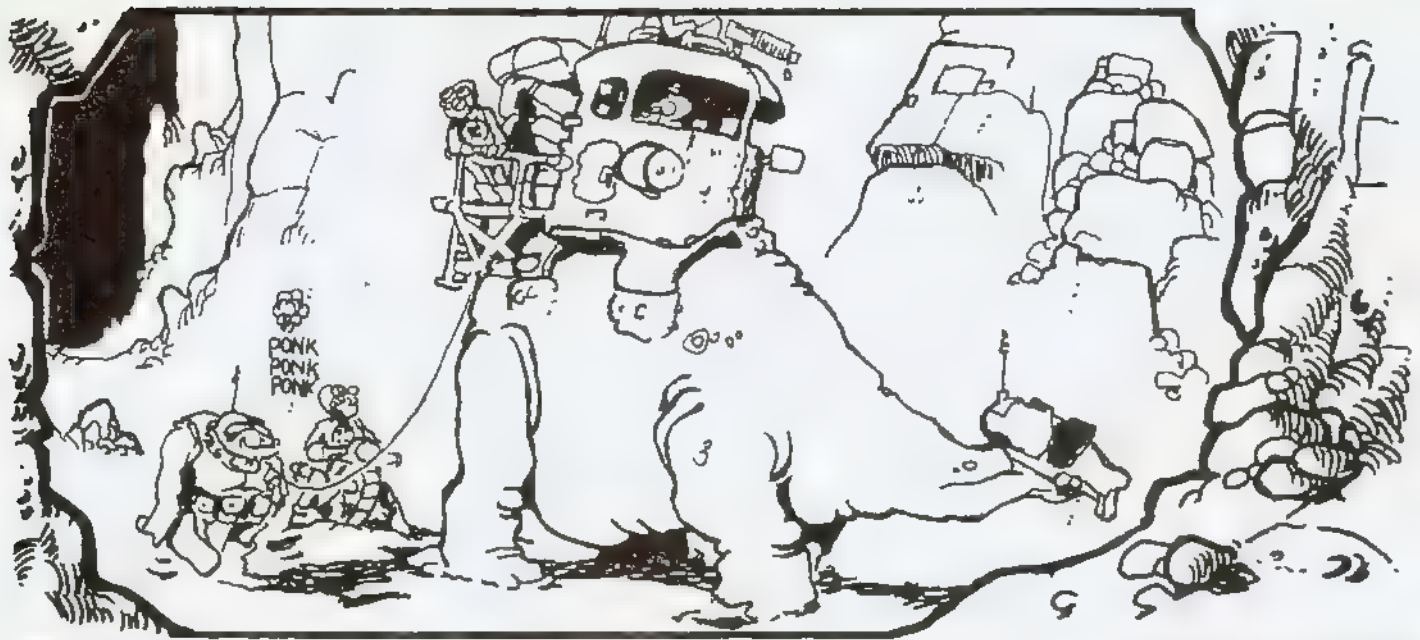


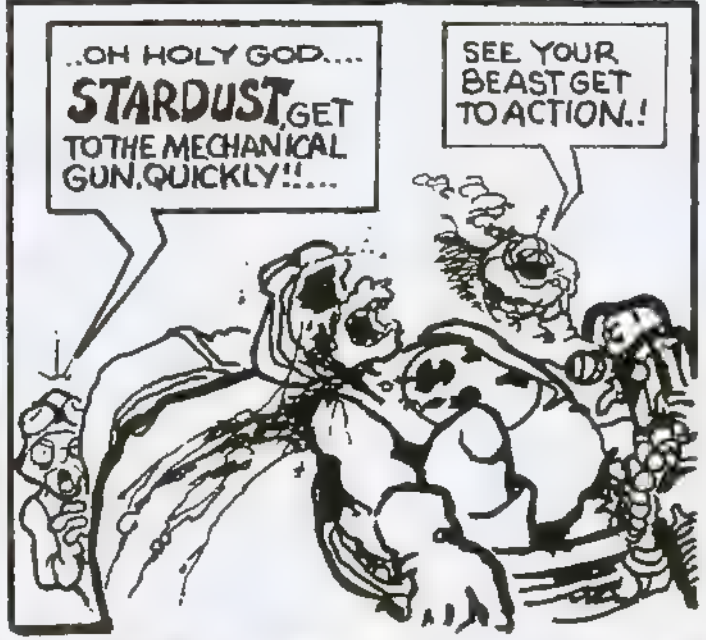
ALRIGHT..YOU BE EASY NOW,
BIG ANIMAL....I SEE.....
WHAT I AM LOOKING FOR...



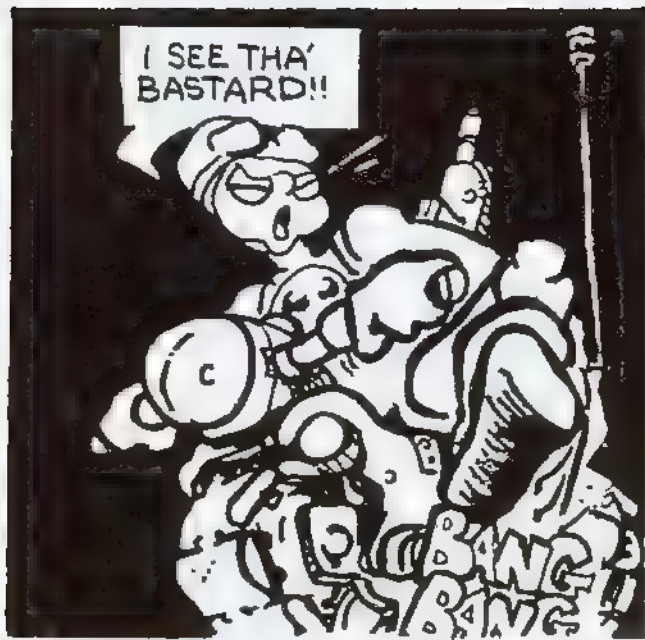
...THE RADIO
TRANSPORT
IS COMING...







I SEE THA' BASTARD!!



YARGH!



DA, DAMN YA, YOU!!!



CLICK



OOOOH GEESSS KAK'COUGH!



MAKE US
COVER! SHOOT
DOWN THE GREAT
GRASSER!!



BUNT
BUNT
BUNT

PING
PING
PING



'SNIFF, DAMN
THEM!...SNIFF.'
I WILL CIRCLE
TO KILL THEM
NOW...COUGH..



HONORED ONE,
DID...DID WE
HIT HIM?...ALL
IS QUIET.....

BE STILL...
WE WAIT...



DEAD MEN!



WHAT?...
JESUS,
THA'
LOPER!!

RARRGH!
KOOOFE!

SING!

GASP...CAN'T...GET..
YARRRRGH!

...HO!...SQUIRM
AWAY LIKE WORM
FISH!...PA-TOOY!
YOU BREAK LOPER'S
TOOTH...

NO LISTEN! IT'S OVER!
I WANTED THE
RADIOS...WE CAN
STOP...LISTEN!!...
I..COUGH, COUGH...

HEHEHE..

YOU SCARDED
TO FIGHT, BIG
LOPER....

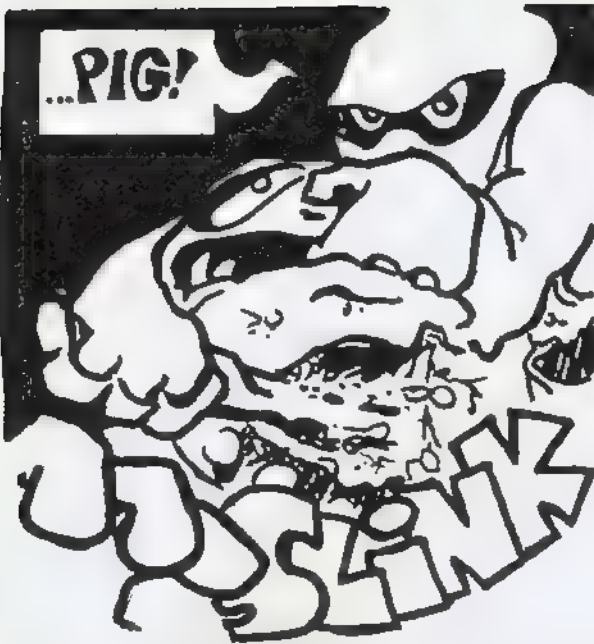
.....I...SMASH
LITTLE SKULL,
WORM-MAN!

HEY!

YOU
DIRTY...

CHING

...PIG!



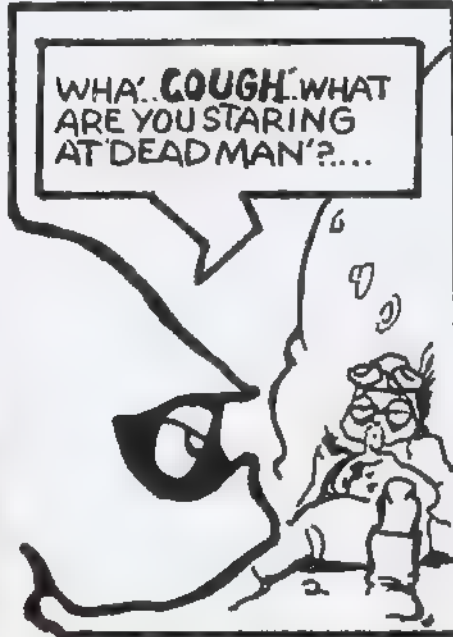
GAK...HUH...HUH
...CHOKE...GURGLE
GURGLE...GURGLE....



COUGH, COUGH
HACK, COUGH..



WHA...COUGH...WHAT
ARE YOU STARING
AT DEAD MAN'?...

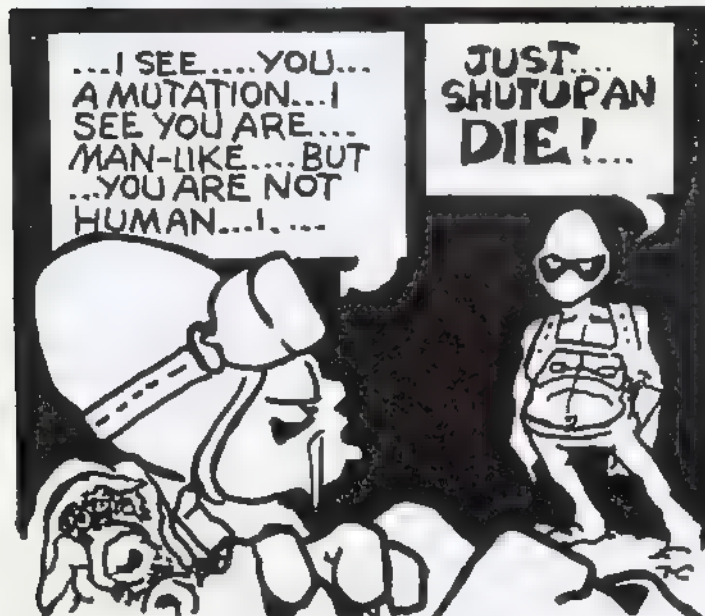


DON'T LOOK
AT ME!!



...I SEE.....YOU...
A MUTATION...I
SEE YOU ARE...
MAN-LIKE..... BUT
...YOU ARE NOT
HUMAN....I....

JUST...
SHUTUP AN
DIE!...



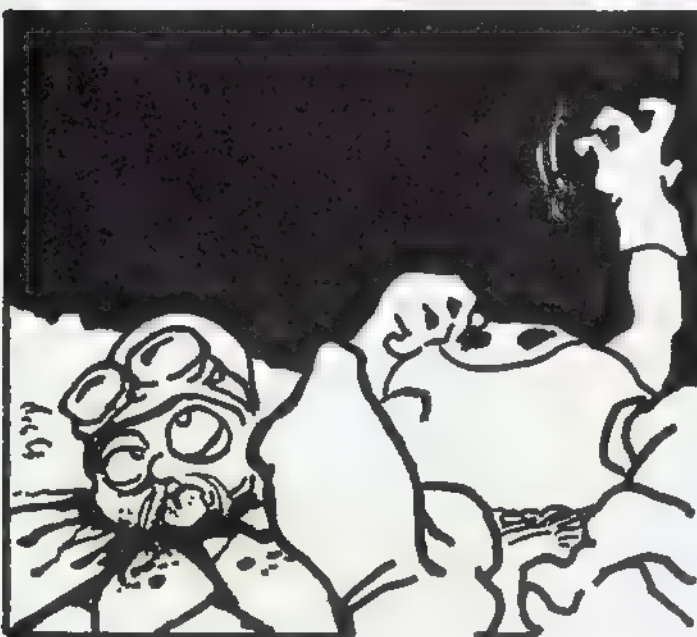
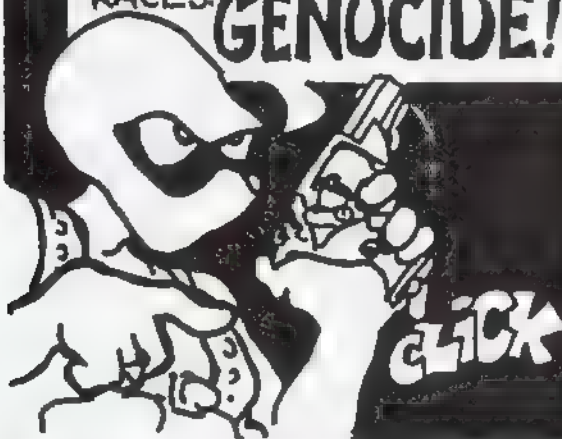
I...I SEE...YOU...
YOU WISH TO BE
HUMAN LIKE US...
BUT...YOU ARE
A MONSTER..

SHUTUP!
SHUTUP!
SHUTUP!



YOU ARE THE MURDERERS,
YOU ARE THE MONSTERS..
THE RADIO ARE TRYING TO
EXTERMINATE ALL MUTANT
RACES.

GENOCIDE!



IN THE EARLY EVENING, THE WIND DIES AND THE HISSING SAND
IS STILL AND A COOL QUIET HANGS OVER THE EMPTY, STERILE
PLACES... COBALT 60 RIDES SLOWLY AWAY ON HIS PLAINS
ANIMAL... OFF INTO THE GREAT OLD MOUNTAINS.....



COBALT-60

BASED ON CHARACTERS BY

~ VAUGHN BODÉ ~

ARTWORK BY

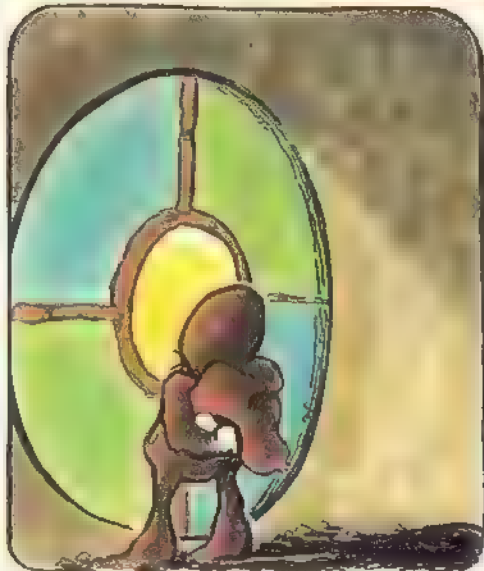
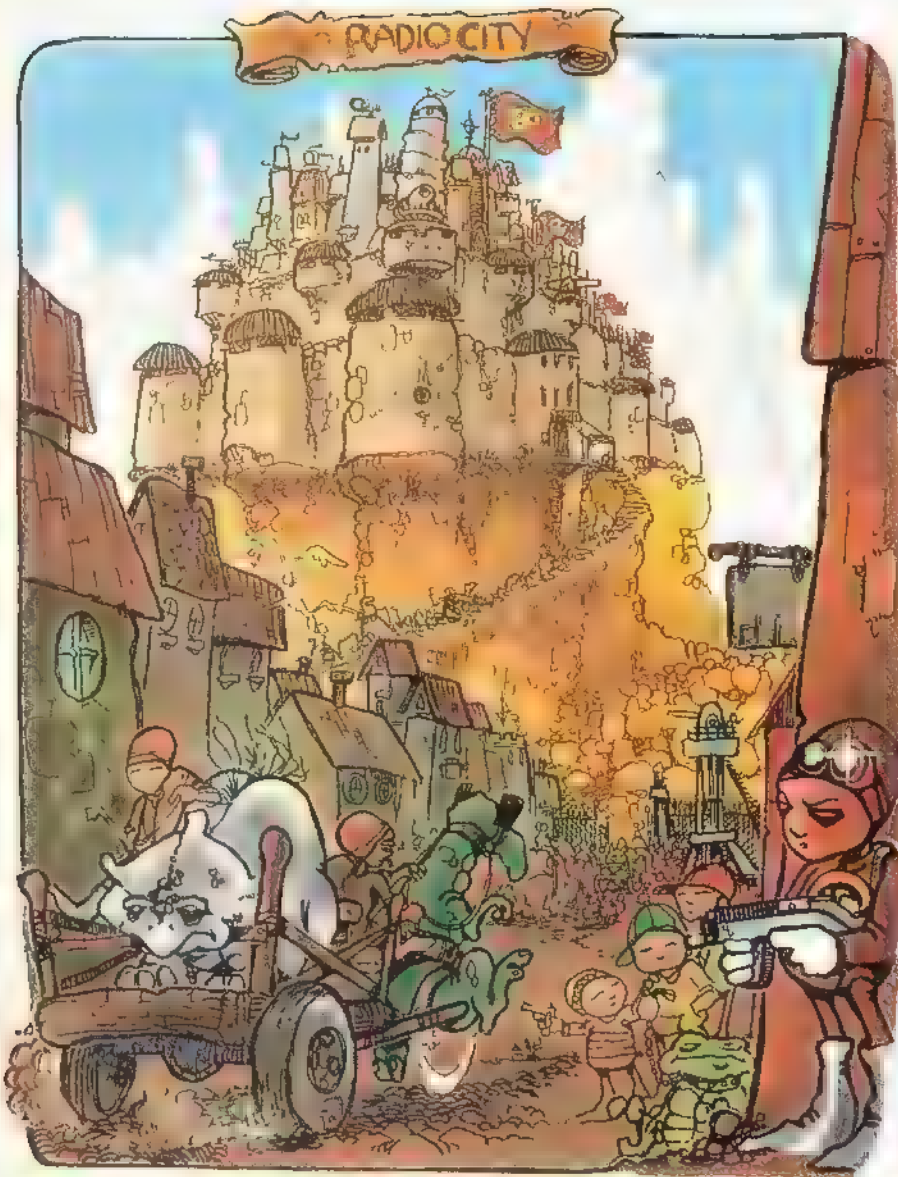
~ MARK BODÉ ~

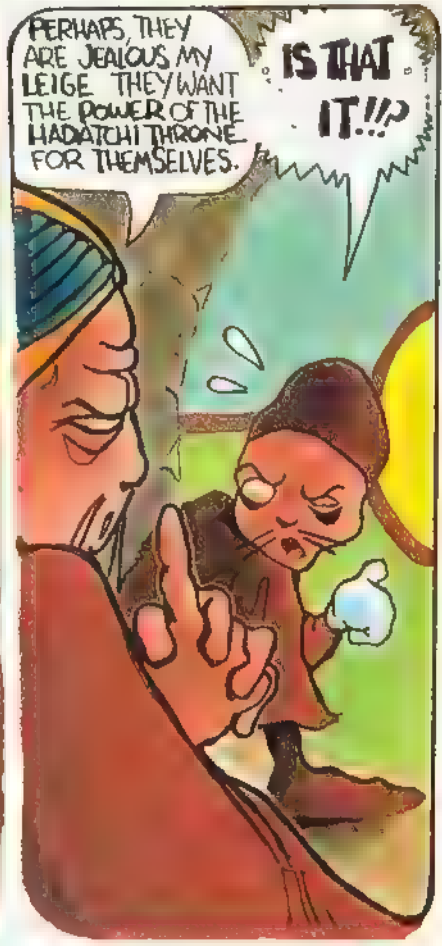
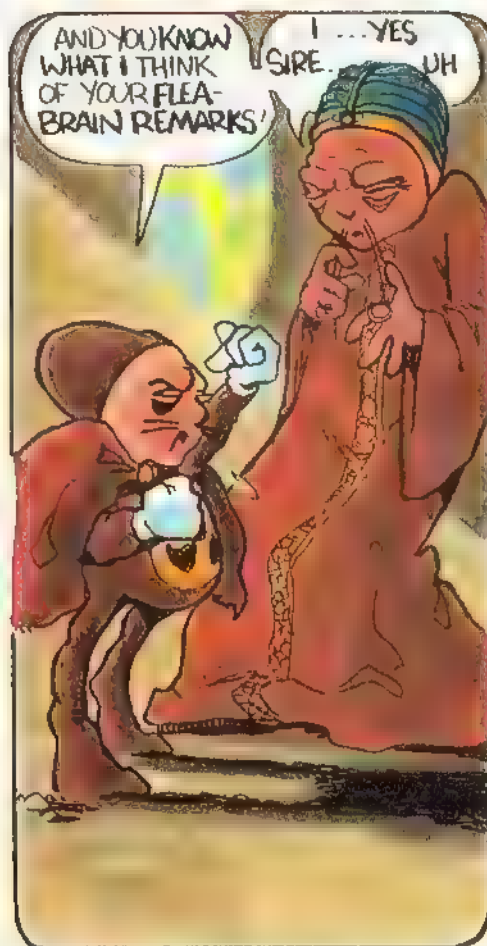
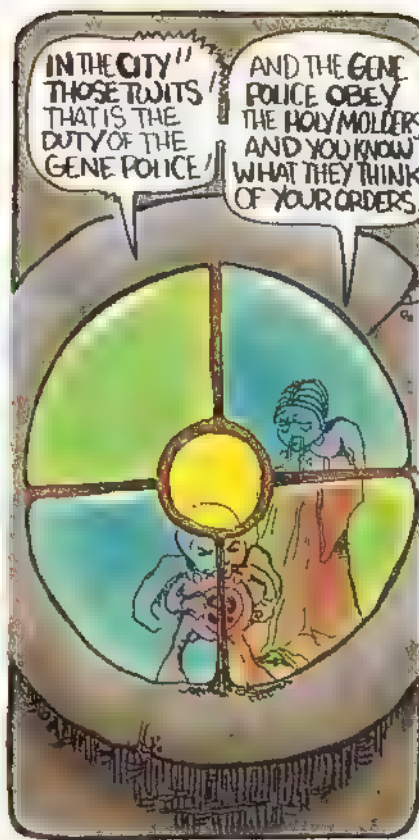
STORY BY

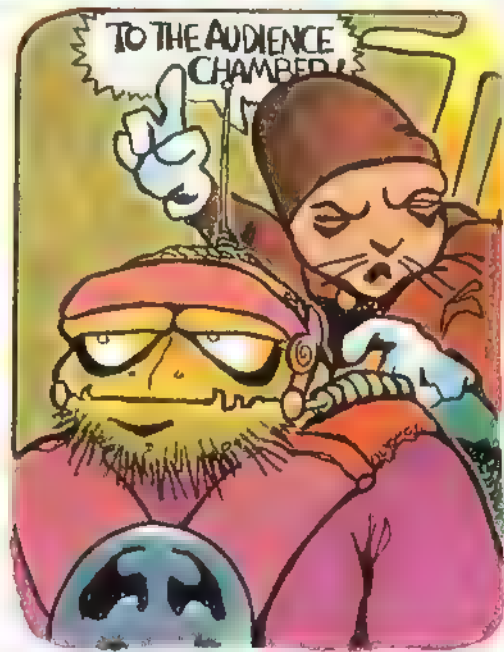
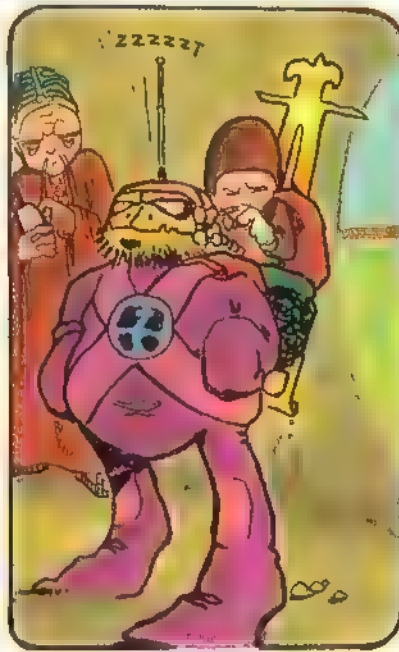
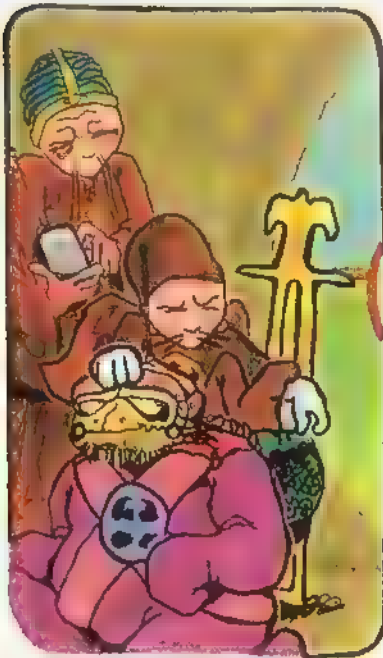
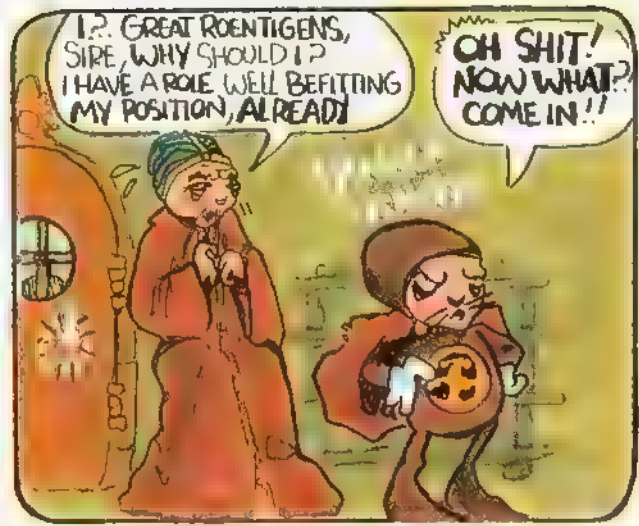
LARRY TODD ~

© 1984 Barbara Bodé and Mark Bodé











SIRE I WAS A TOPGUNNER WITH A PERIMETER
PATROL OVER EAST IN THE SACTO CRATER
TERRITORY. WE WERE 8 OF US, 2 MOTOR TRACKS
2 LOPEERS, A TRANSPORT GRASSER GAK

RRRRNNN
RN-RN-MERRR

THUMPA
THUMPA
THUMPA

WE WERE AMBUSHED SIRE!!
SHOT TO PIECES BY A HIDDEN
SNIPER WHO COULD, IT SEEMS
BE IN 3 PLACES AT ONCE!!
HE SLEW US ALL BY GUN AND
KNIFE, SAVE ME, WHOM
HE LEFT FOR DEAD.

BIAM
BIAM
BIAM

LOPER KILL
MASKED
MA AGG!

WHO,
WAS HE?

PA-TANG

SIRE, NEVER I SAW HIS FACE
HE WORE A WHITE CLOTH
SURELY HE WAS A MARGINAL
THOUGH HIS CHEST AND ARMS
SHOWED NO SIGNS OF OBVIOUS MUT

CONTINUE!!!

SPEAK YOU FOOL!
WE'LL HAVE YOU-

THE USELESS
SHIT IS DEAD
SIRE.

DEAD! HOW DARE HE
DIE IN OUR AUGUST
PRESENCE! HAVE HIM
THROWN TO THE CESS
PIT!!

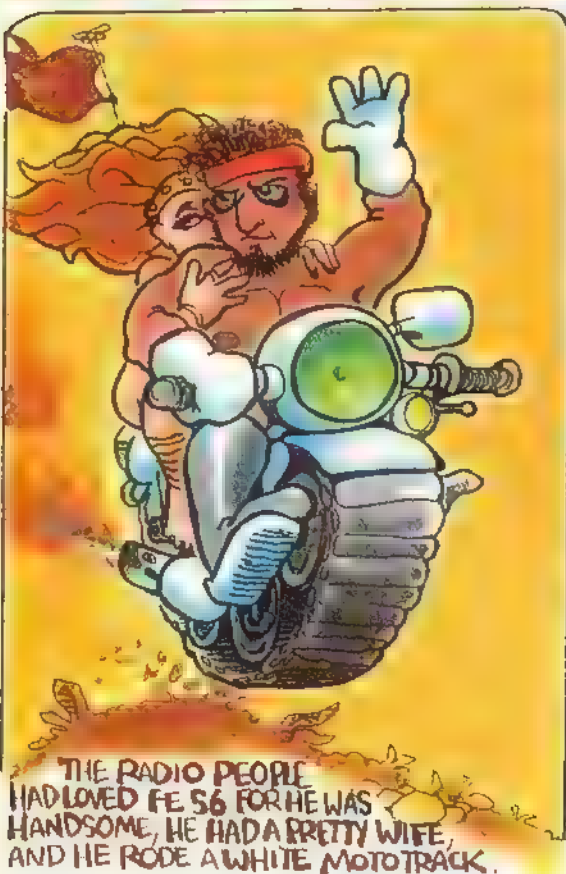
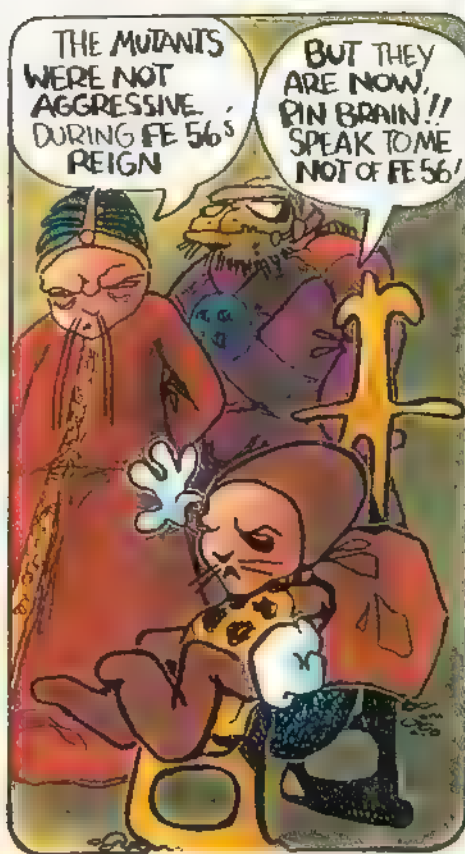
SIRE!!

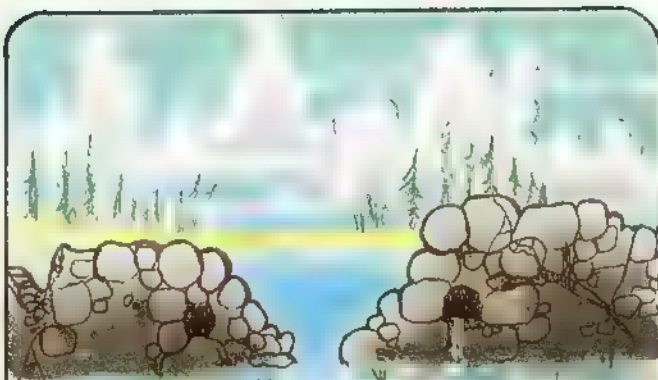
HAVE IT DONE!
DO YOU WISH TO
FOLLOW HIM?

GLIP!!
AH, AS AS
YOU WILL
SIRE!!

SIRE, THAT WAS
NOT WISE

WHAT
WAS NOT
WISE?





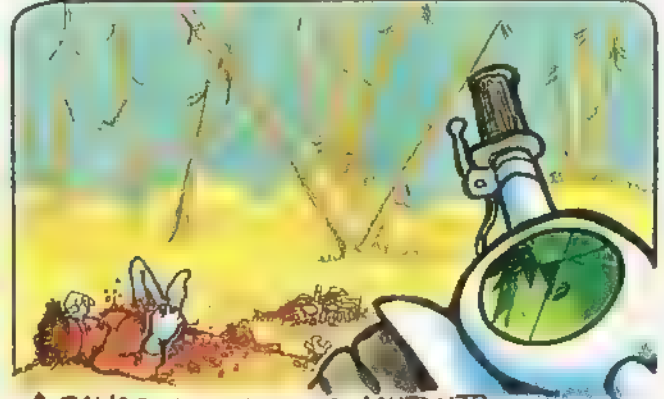
BUT AN EARTHQUAKE, NOT UNCOMMON IN OLD RADIO LAND, CRUMBLLED THE DAM LEAVING, SWAMPS



THE HARVEST FAILED, FOOD SUPPLIES BECAME SCARCE, AND HUNGRY MUTANTS CAME DOWN FROM THE HILLS TO PREY ON CROP REMAINS



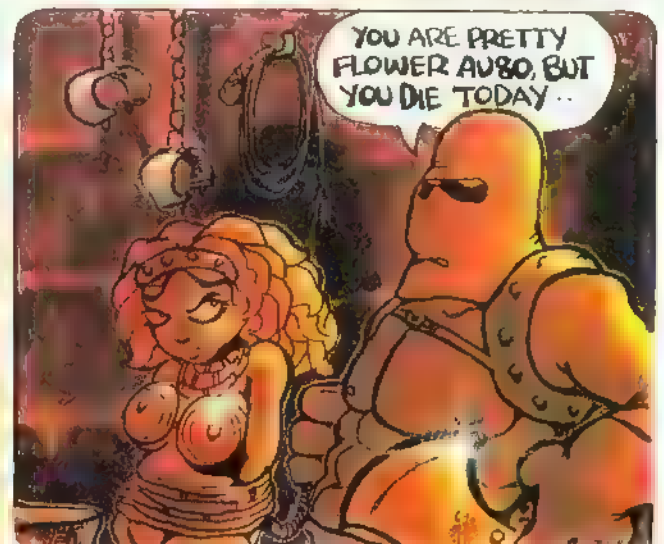
FE 56 WENT OUT TO LAKE BARIESA DAM TO VIEW WHAT HAD HAPPENED, AND HERE TRAGEDY STRUCK-



A RAVAGING BAND OF MUTANTS ATTACKED AND KILLED HIS WHOLE PARTY, OR SO IT WAS SURMISED FROM THE CANNIBALIZED AND HALF MUTILATED BODIES

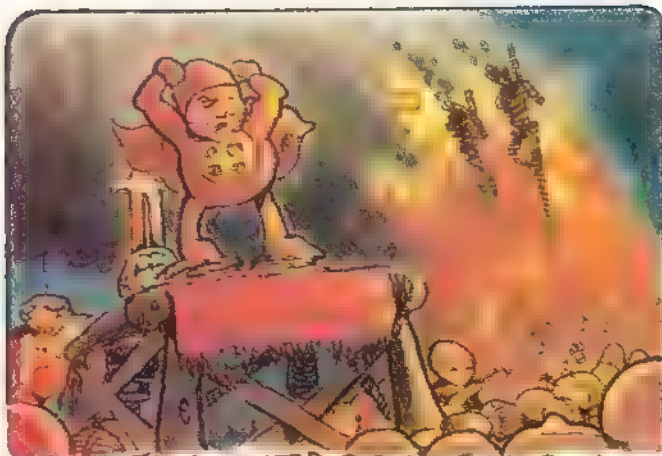


FE 56'S PRIME MINISTER STRONTIUM 90, PRONOUNCED HIMSELF REGENT AND SENT HIS AGENTS HUNTING FOR FE 56'S CONSORT AU80 AND HIS SON COBALT 60



YOU ARE PRETTY FLOWER AU80, BUT YOU DIE TODAY...

AU80 FEARED THE WORST AND SENT HER CHILD OUT INTO THE EASTERN WASTES WITH A TRUSTED GUARDIAN, WHILE SHE REMAINED TO FACE STRONTIUM 90'S INQUIRIES.



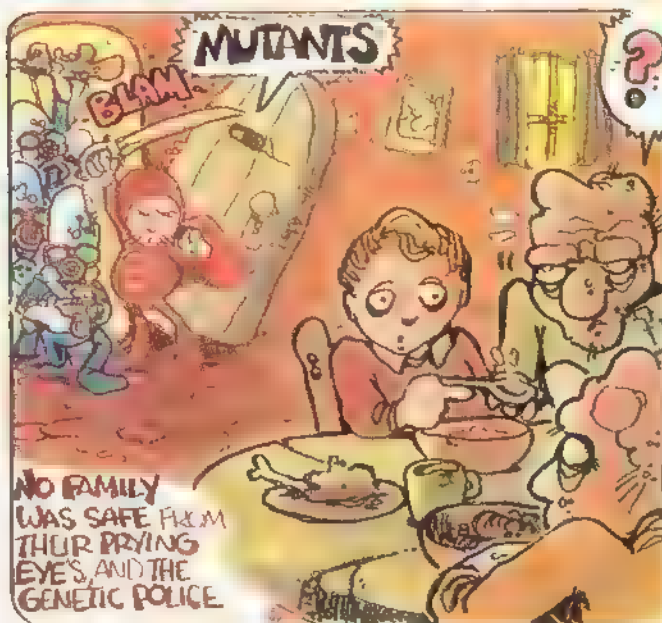
THE MUTILATED BODIES OF THE ROYAL FAMILY WERE DISPLAYED BEFORE A PUBLIC CREMATION, STRONTIUM 90 VOWED EVERLASTING VENGEANCE ON THE MUTANT SCUM THAT DID THIS DEED



THE OLD COLONEL OF A RADIOISOTOPIC FAMILY, POLONIUM 210, WAS ELEVATED TO PRIME MINISTER, AND HE CROWNED STRONTIUM 90 KING & EMPEROR AND THE TWO CONDUCTED A REIGN OF TERROR.

WE DID IT STRONTIUM!

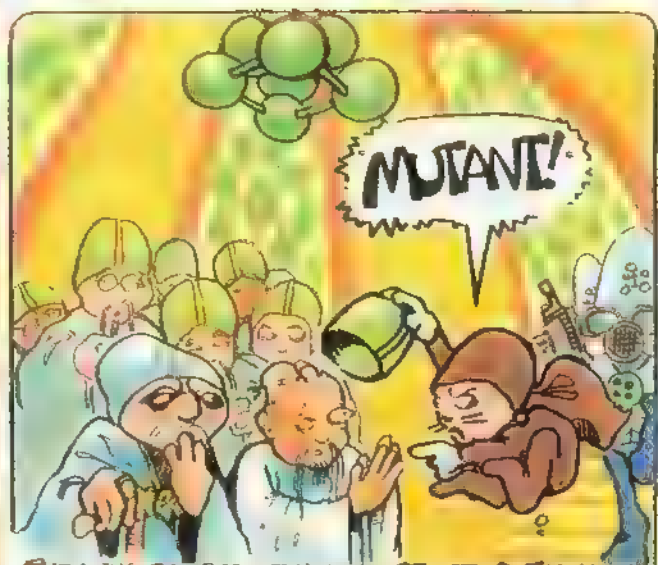
HEH!



MUTANTS

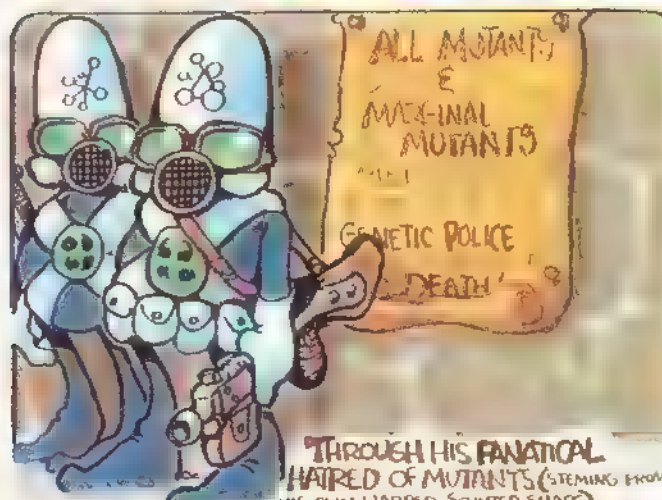
BLAM!

NO FAMILY WAS SAFE FROM THEIR DYING EYES AND THE GENETIC POLICE



MUTANT!

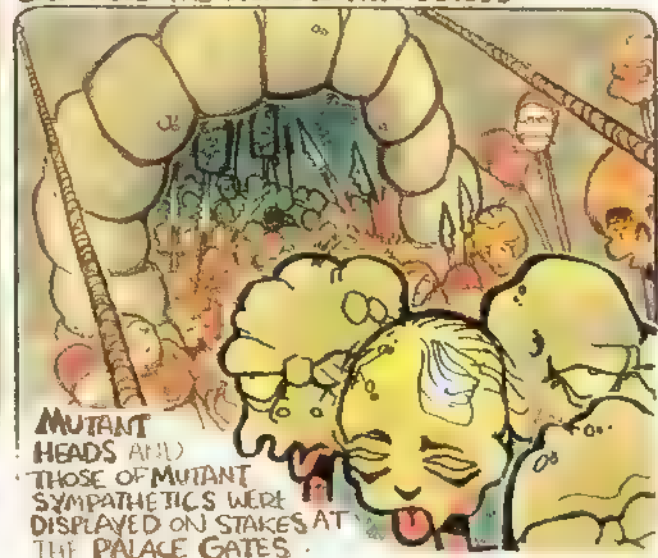
EVEN THE PRIESTS OF HUMAN GENETICS, THE HOLY MOLDERS, WERE SUSPECTED BY STRONTIUM NOT LEAST BECAUSE THEY CONTROLLED THE GENETIC POLICE, WHO ENFORCED THE STERILIZATION EDICTS



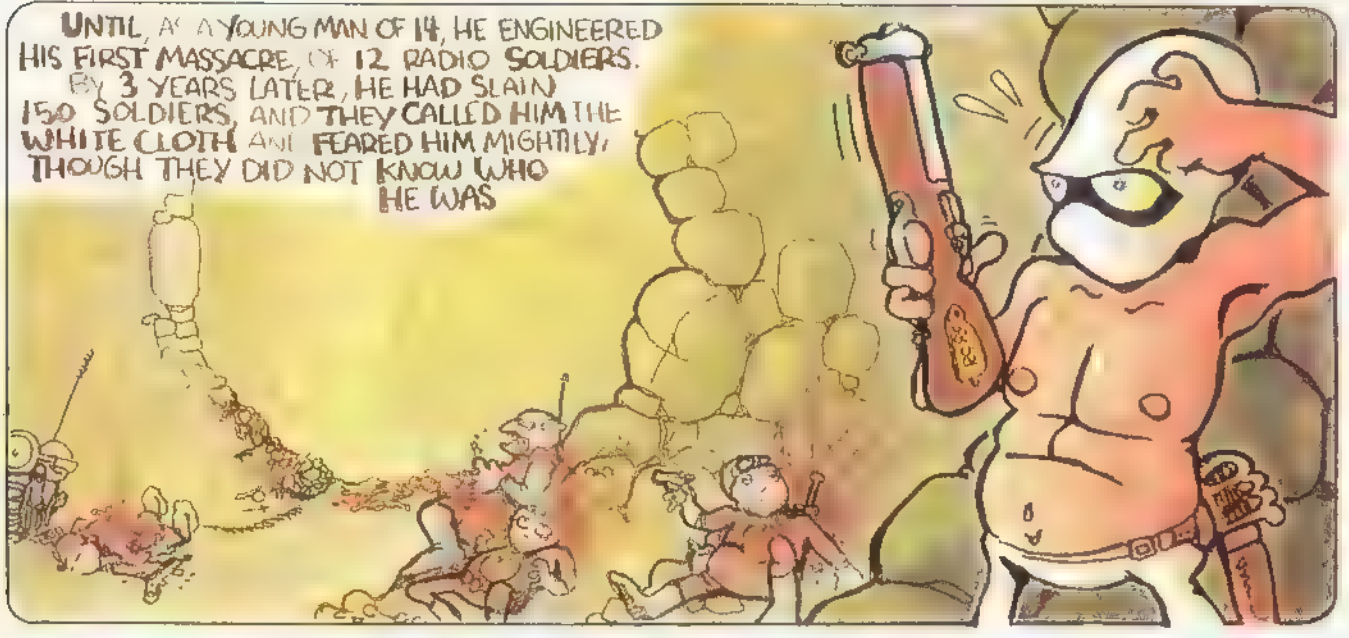
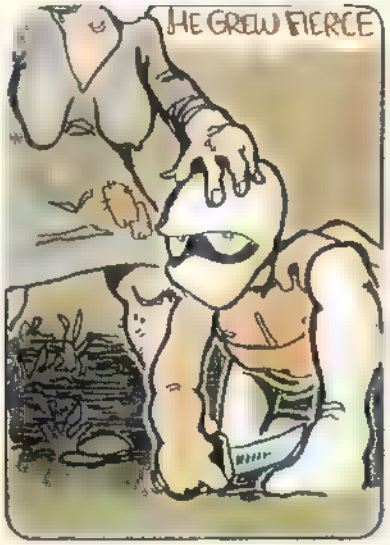
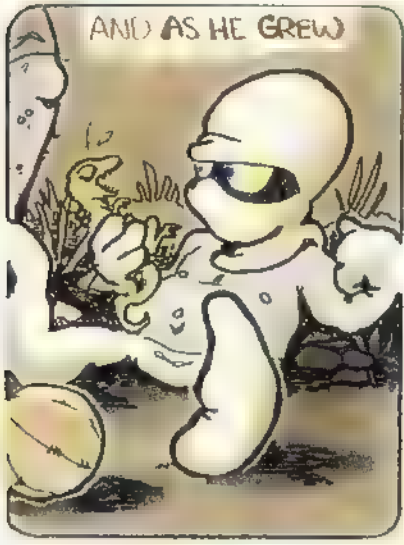
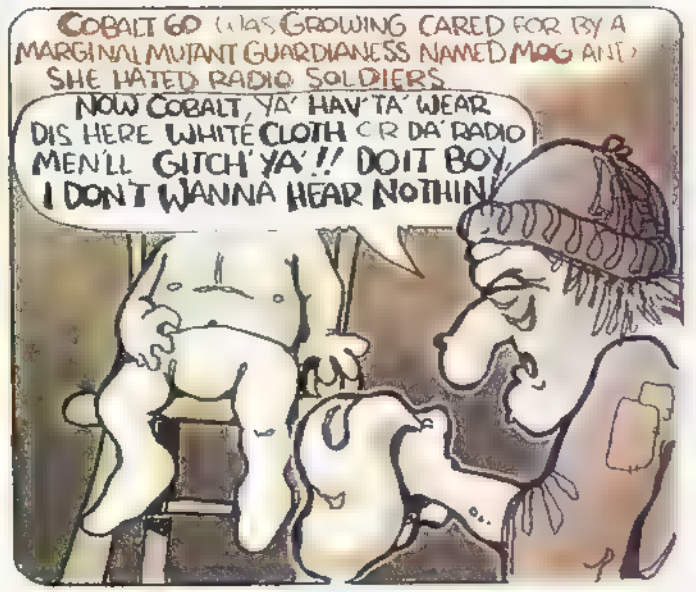
ALL MUTANTS & MARGINAL MUTANTS

GENETIC POLICE DEATH

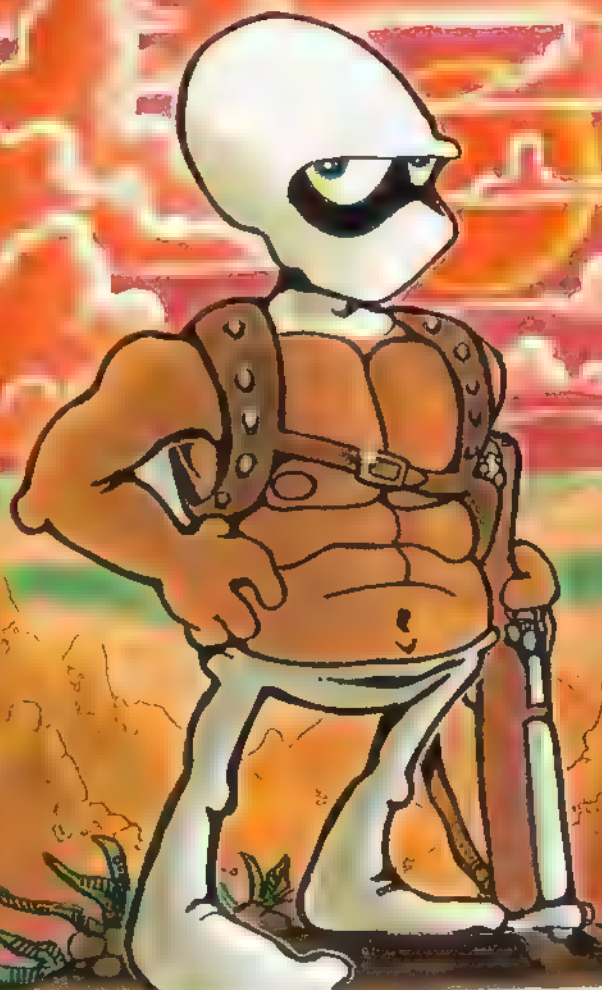
THROUGH HIS FANATICAL HATRED OF MUTANTS (STEMMING FROM HIS OWN WARPED STUNTED SHAPE) STRONTIUM 90 FORCED THE GENE POLICE TO EVER TIGHTER ENFORCEMENT OF THE POLICY OF PURITY FAMILIES IN THE MARGINAL MUTANT MEMBERS HAD TO FLEE



MUTANT HEADS AND THOSE OF MUTANT SYMPATHETICS WERE DISPLAYED ON STAKES AT THE PALACE GATES



SOON THEY WOULD KNOW
A NAME FOR THE WHITE CLOTH

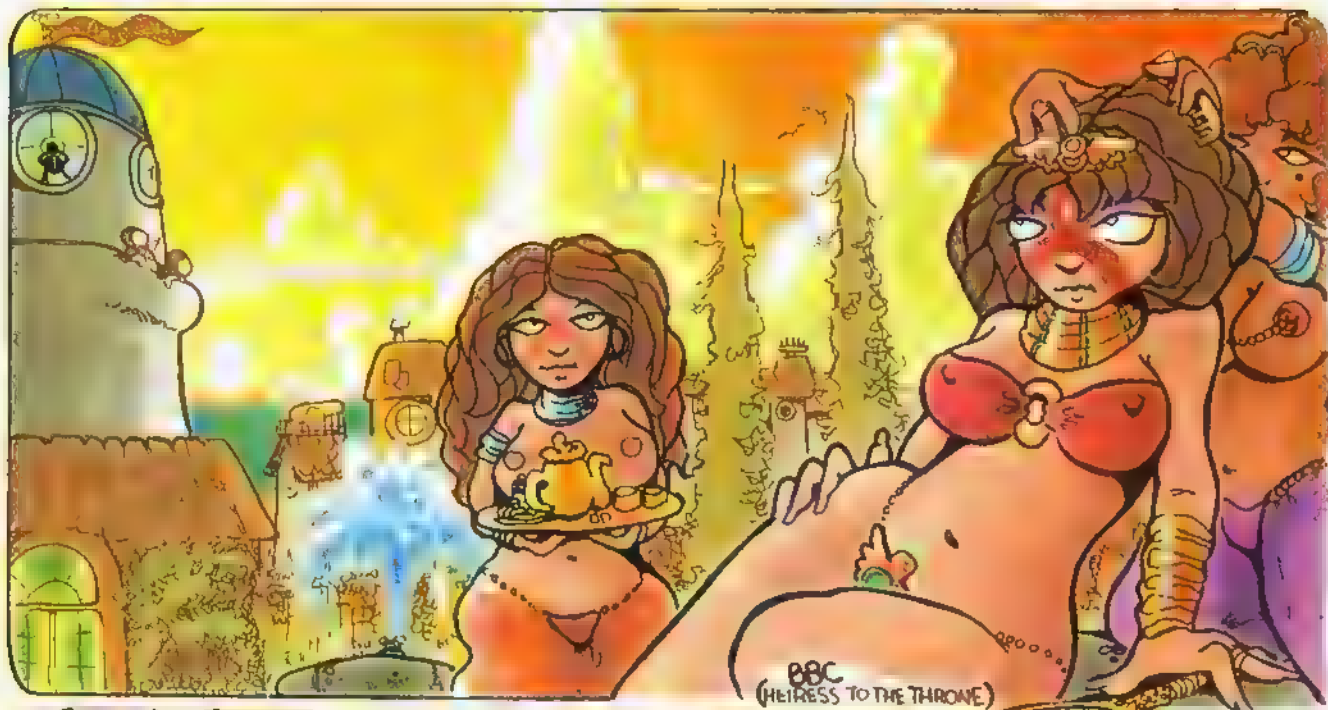


COBALT 60// THE ANGEL
OF DEATH! DESTROYER OF
THE RADIO PEOPLE!

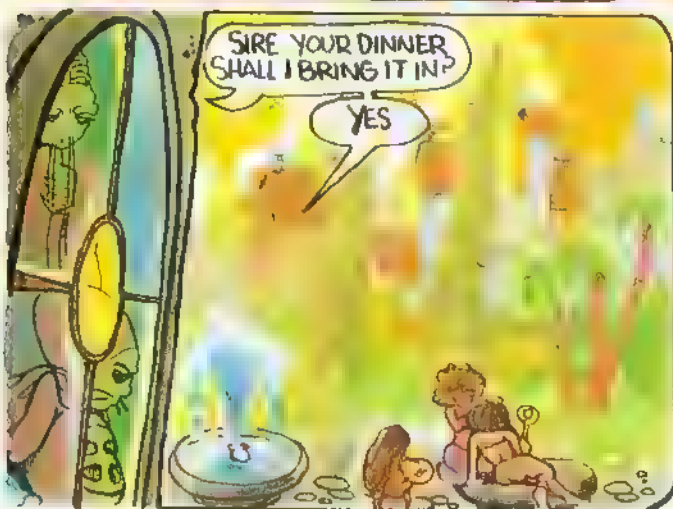
SHE LOVES ME, SHE LOVES
ME NOT

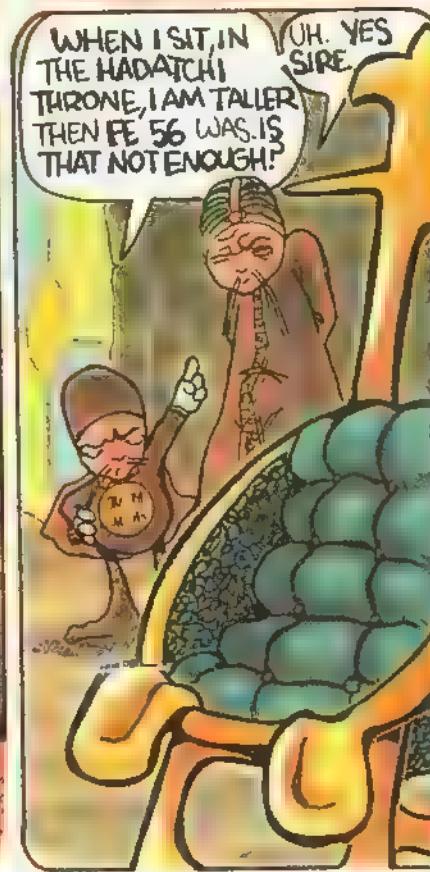
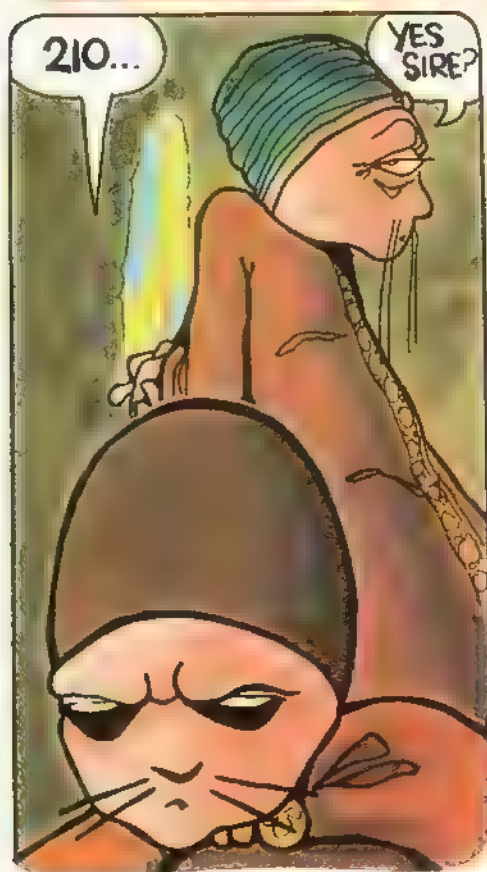
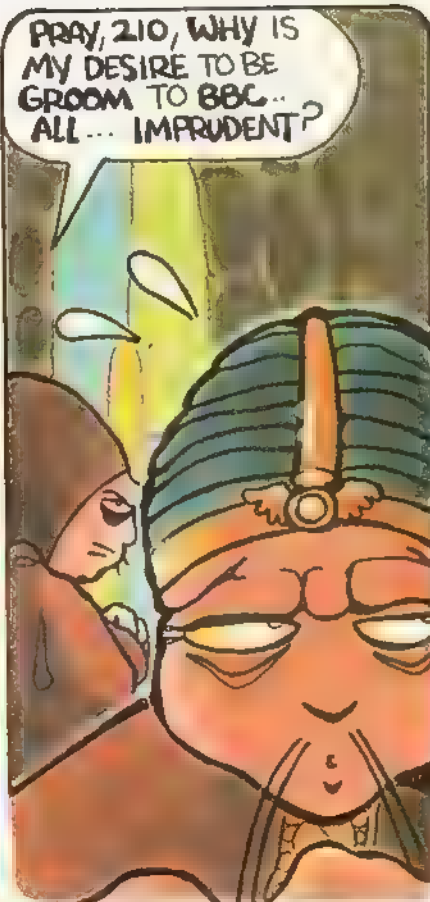


MARK BODE 89



BBC
(HEIRESS TO THE THRONE)





Relic

A new star system. A new planet. An exploration ship orbits its latest find. Within the craft's main cabin, scanners hum, read-out screens pulse and glow.

THIS DOES IT LOADED WITH ORE, MINERALS, NUTRIENTS. NO MAJOR LIFE FORMS WE'VE MADE QUOTA, KIRTH. I CAN FIRE THE PEG FROM HERE AND--

YOU KNOW I'LL WANT A LOOK, JAREL.

THE INSTRUMENTS ARE CORE STANDARD. TOP OF THE LINE. I DON'T SEE WHY YOU REFUSE TO TRUST THEM.

IT'S NOT THAT I DON'T TRUST THEM IT'S JUST THAT I HATE FEELING OBSOLETE.

To the man called Kirth, the tension is like an old friend, always there this late in a mission. He has experienced it with too many other partners just as young and just as impatient as Jarel.

GROOM
© 1980

EPIC

Begrudgingly, the younger man programs a descent. The ship sweeps down, carrying them low over landscape startling in its variety after the vastness of space.

WE ARE
OBSOLETE
KIRTH... CORE IS
PHASING OUT
HUMAN BACK-UPS
ON THESE
PROBES

IF THEY DIDN'T
OFFER TWO-LEVEL
ADVANCEMENTS FOR
SIGNING ON THESE
TRIPS, DO YOU THINK
I'D BE HERE?

WELL,
THERE'S
CERTAINLY NOT
THE SAME EXCITEMENT
AS ON MY FIRST
PROBE BEFORE
EVERYTHING
WAS ALL
INSTRUMENTS
AND--

I SAW
SOMETHING OUT
THE PORT, JAREL!
THERE'S JUNGLE
COMING UP... WE'LL
SET DOWN AT
ITS EDGE!

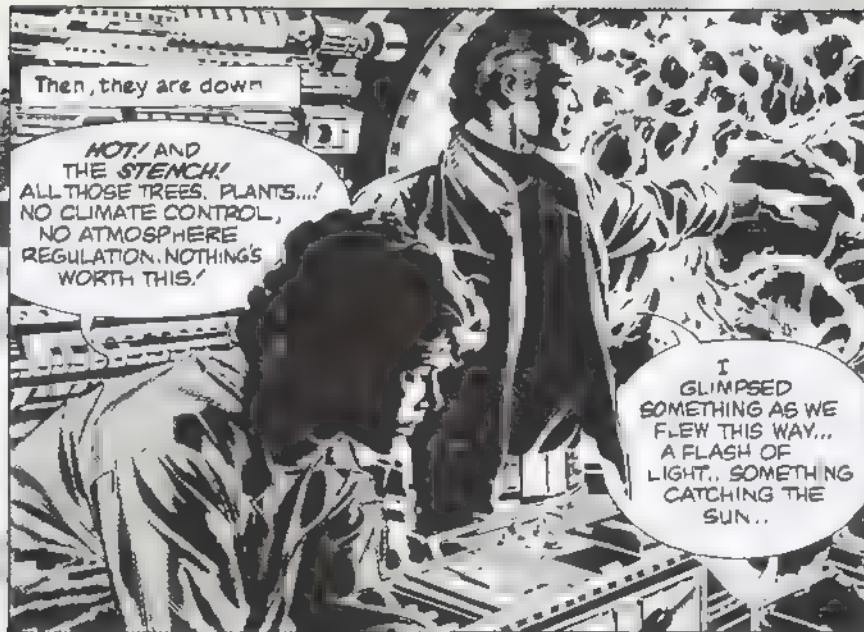
WHAT?!

MOST TEAMS
WOULDN'T EVEN DO
A *FLY-OVER*, KIRTH!
NOTHING ON OUR SCAN
JUST FIES THIS WHY
NOT PLANT OUR
HOMING-PEG AND
GET OUT OF
HERE?

BECAUSE
I'M SENIOR
EXPEDITION
MEMBER, AND WE'RE
PLAYING THIS
MY WAY BEFORE
S GNA LLING
FOR THE
SAPPERS.

SAPPERS. Kirth wonders how many planets he has found for them in his long years of service, worlds sucked dry of every natural resource by these mammoth interstellar drone-craft to provide food, fuel, and raw materials for Core's billions upon billions of dependent citizens...

...and why he continues to resist the notion of turning over the probing for ever more such worlds to machines as well.



Then, they are down

**HOT! AND
THE STENCH!**
ALL THOSE TREES, PLANTS...!
NO CLIMATE CONTROL,
NO ATMOSPHERE
REGULATION. NOTHING'S
WORTH THIS!

I
GLIMPSED
SOMETHING AS WE
FLEW THIS WAY...
A FLASH OF
LIGHT, SOMETHING
CATCHING THE
SUN..



CURIOSITY!
WE'RE DAWDLING
IN SOME GALACTIC
BACKWATER BECAUSE
YOU'RE CURIOUS!

COME ON, JAREL.
HAVEN'T YOU EVER
WANTED TO SEE AT
LEAST **ONE** OF THE
WORLDS WE'VE
PEGGED FOR
SAPPING UP
CLOSE?

THIS
PLANET WILL
WRAP OUR
MISSION, AND CORE
WILL PROBABLY
INSIST I RETIRE
ALLOW ME A
SMALL
WHIM.

WITH YOUR CREDITS YOU COULD HAVE
BEEN A TENTH-LEVEL EXEC BY NOW,
KIRTH. ONLY **THIS** KIND OF STUNT
KEEPS HOLDING YOU BACK.



JAREL, HOW
MANY WORLDS
HAVE BEEN TURNED
INTO USELESS HUSKS
ON OUR WORD?
IT NAGS ME JUST THIS
ONE LAST TIME
I WANT TO BE
CERTAIN WHAT I'M
CONDEMNING TO
DESTRUCTION.

CORE HAS PRECISE GUIDELINES ABOUT INTELLIGENT LIFE
IF IT EXISTED HERE, THE INSTRUMENTS WOULD HAVE
SHOWN IT ALL YOU'RE GOING TO FIND--

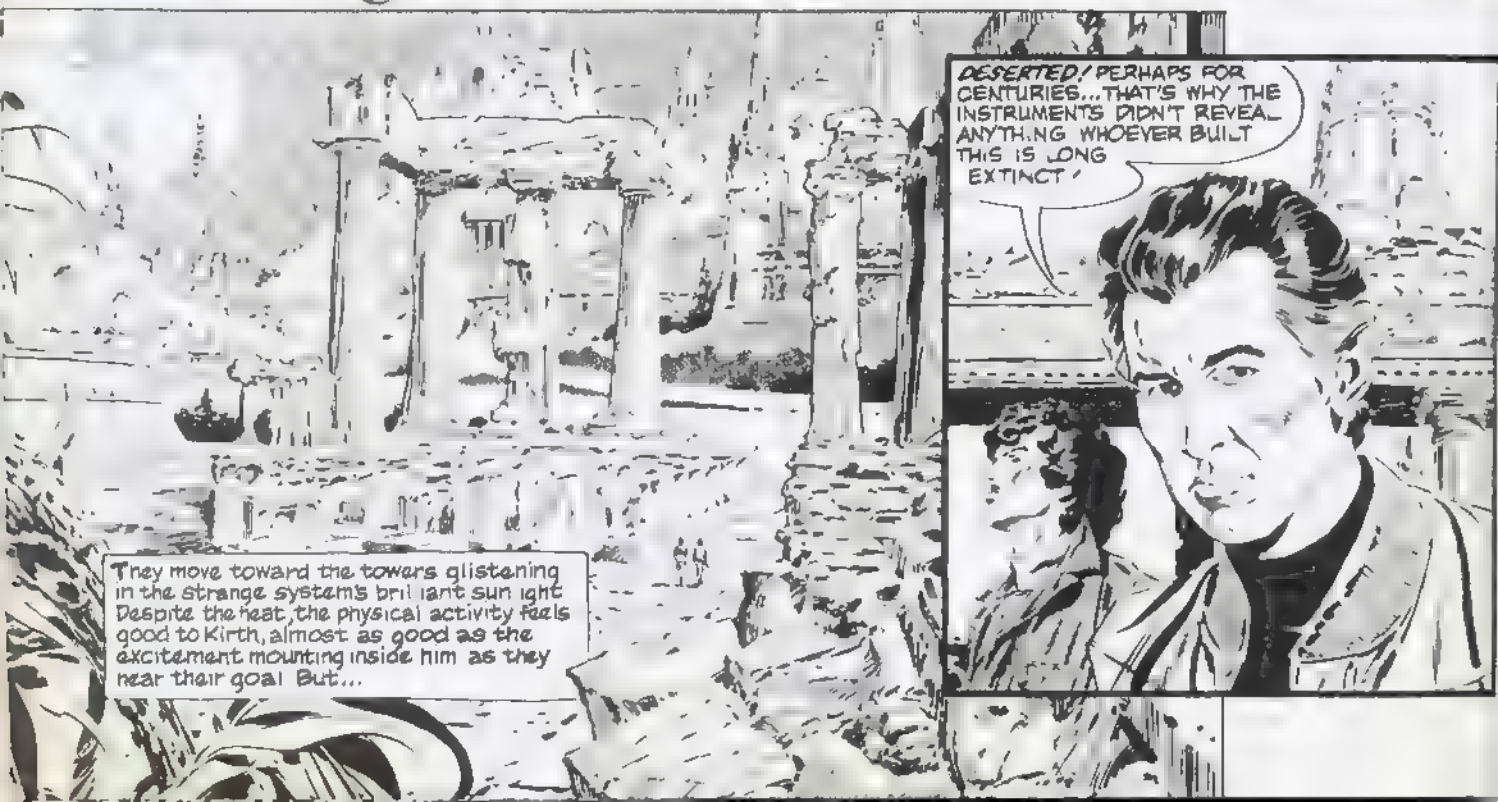
--ARE THE KIND OF
STUPID **SUB-SPECIES**
THAT ALREADY OVERRUN
THE WHOLE GALAXY!





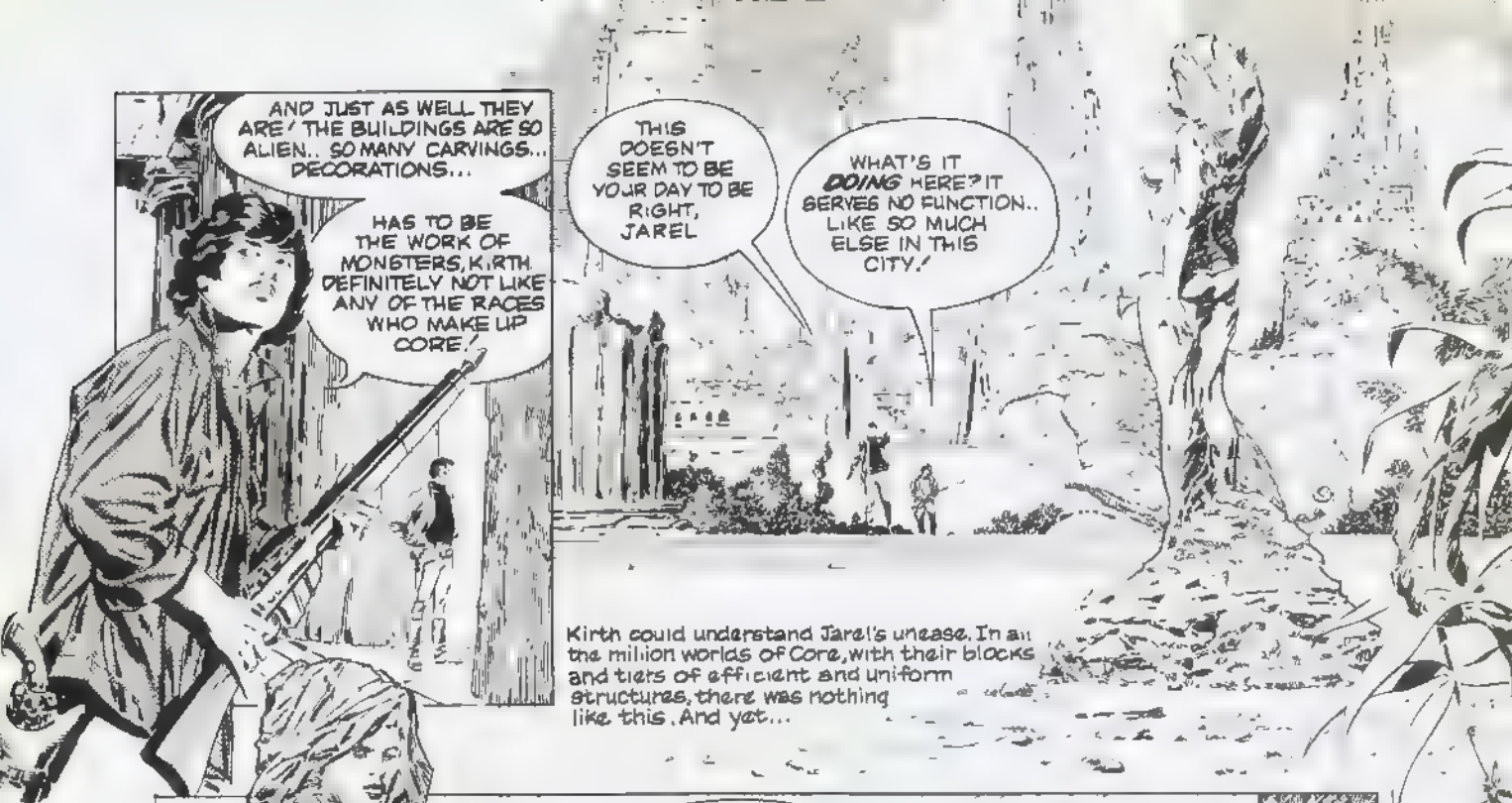
MAYBE NOT,
JAREL

AT LEAST WE
KNOW THAT FLASH
OF LIGHT I
SPOTTED WASN'T
MY IMAGINATION



DESERTED, PERHAPS FOR
CENTURIES... THAT'S WHY THE
INSTRUMENTS DIDN'T REVEAL
ANYTHING WHOEVER BUILT
THIS IS LONG
EXTINCT

They move toward the towers glistening
in the strange system's brilliant sunlight.
Despite the heat, the physical activity feels
good to Kirth, almost as good as the
excitement mounting inside him as they
near their goal. But...



AND JUST AS WELL THEY ARE! THE BUILDINGS ARE SO ALIEN... SO MANY CARVINGS... DECORATIONS...

HAS TO BE THE WORK OF MONSTERS, KIRTH. DEFINITELY NOT LIKE ANY OF THE RACES WHO MAKE UP CORE.

THIS DOESN'T SEEM TO BE YOUR DAY TO BE RIGHT, JAREK.

WHAT'S IT *DOING* HERE? IT SERVES NO FUNCTION... LIKE SO MUCH ELSE IN THIS CITY.

Kirth could understand Jarek's unease. In all the million worlds of Core, with their blocks and tiers of efficient and uniform structures, there was nothing like this. And yet...



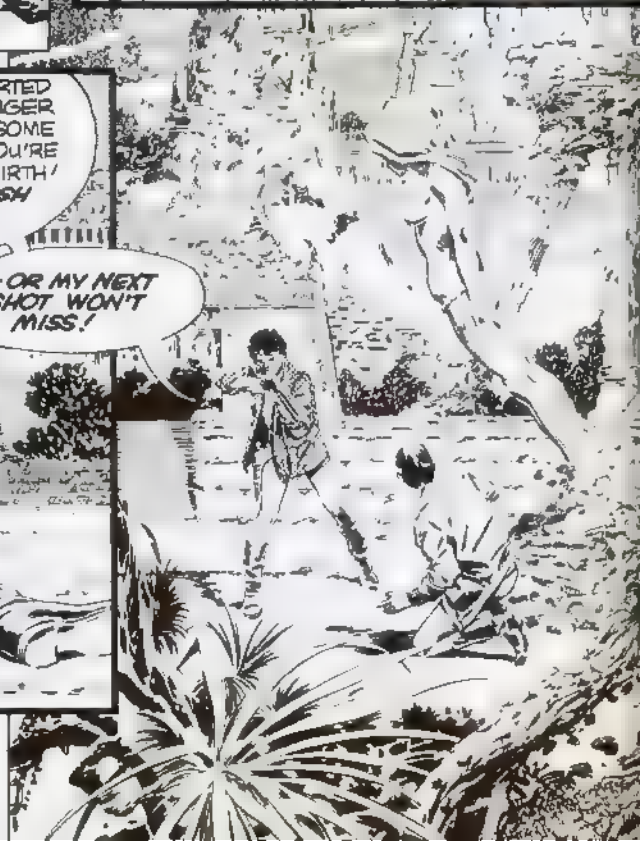
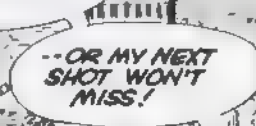
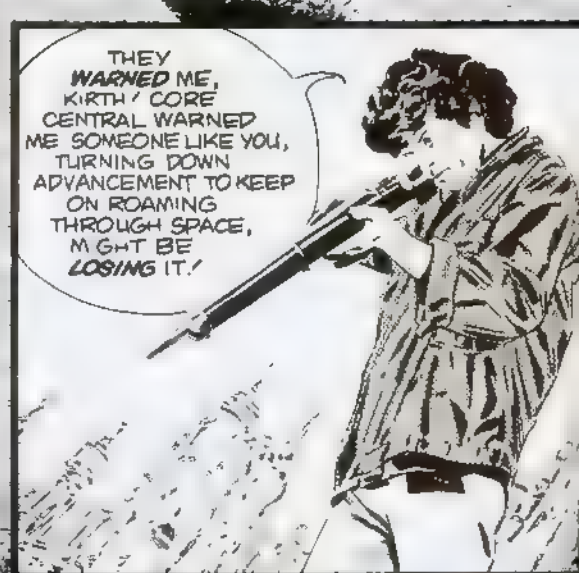
IN ITS OWN WAY, IT'S NOT WITHOUT A CERTAIN APPEAL...

USELESS! NO WONDER THE CREATORS OF THIS PLACE DIED OFF. THEIR ART, THEIR ARCHITECTURE IS TOTALLY INDULGENT DECADENT! CORE COULD MAKE THIS SPACE ALONE HOUSE THOUSANDS.

BUT THEY COULDN'T MAKE IT *LOOK* LIKE THIS. THE MORE I STUDY THE PLACE, JAREK... THE MORE I THINK I COULD SPEND DAYS HERE... WEEKS...

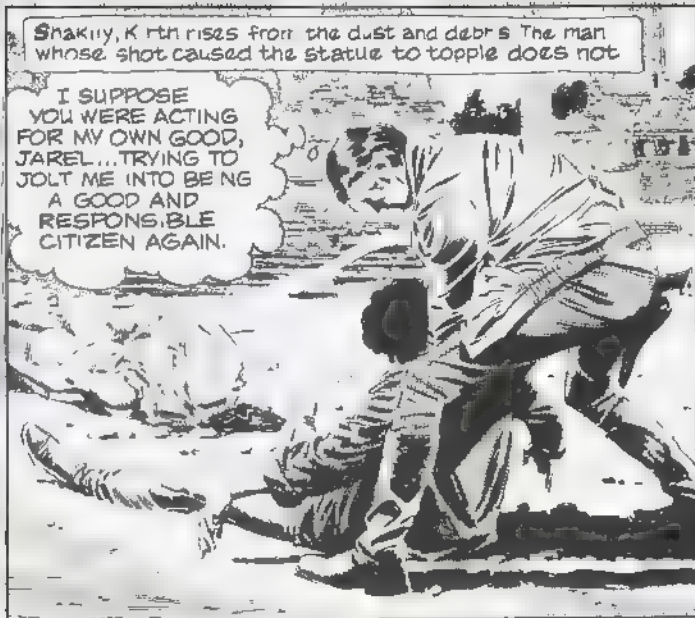
WE'VE *ALREADY* BEEN HERE TOO LONG! NO MORE WHIMS, KIRTH! BACK TO THE SHIP--

--I'M PLANTING THE PEG SO WE CAN RETURN TO CIVILIZATION AND THIS JUNKYARD CAN BE SAPPED FOR ALL IT'S *REALLY* WORTH!

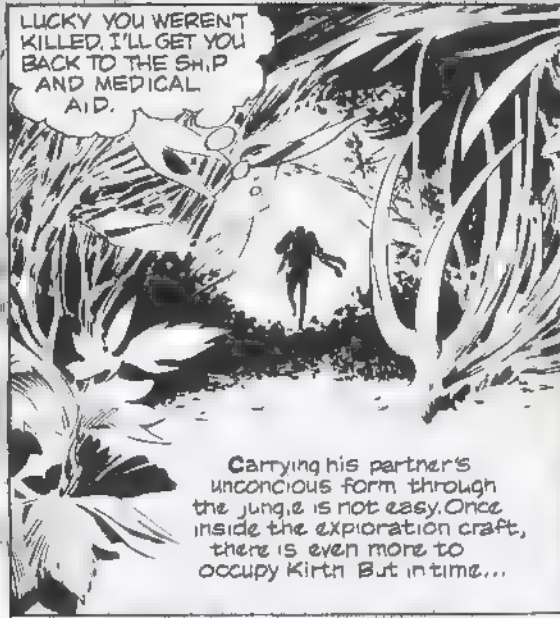


Shakily, Kirth rises from the dust and debris. The man whose shot caused the statue to topple does not

I SUPPOSE
YOU WERE ACTING
FOR MY OWN GOOD,
JAREL... TRYING TO
JOLT ME INTO BEING
A GOOD AND
RESPONSIBLE
CITIZEN AGAIN.



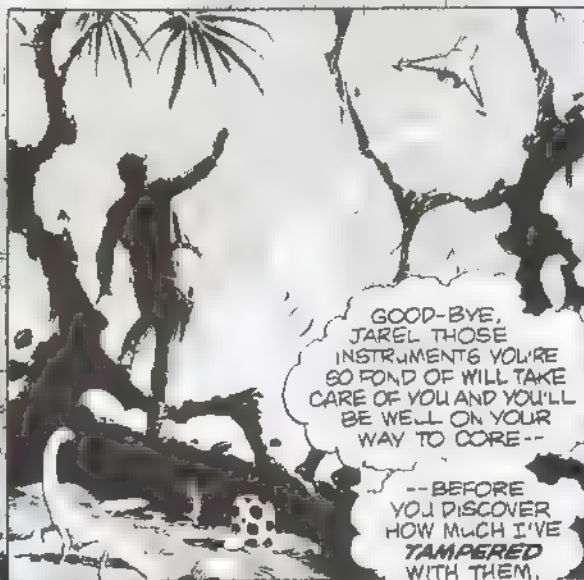
LUCKY YOU WEREN'T
KILLED, I'LL GET YOU
BACK TO THE SHIP
AND MEDICAL
AID.



Carrying his partner's
unconscious form through
the jungle is not easy. Once
inside the exploration craft,
there is even more to
occupy Kirth. But in time...

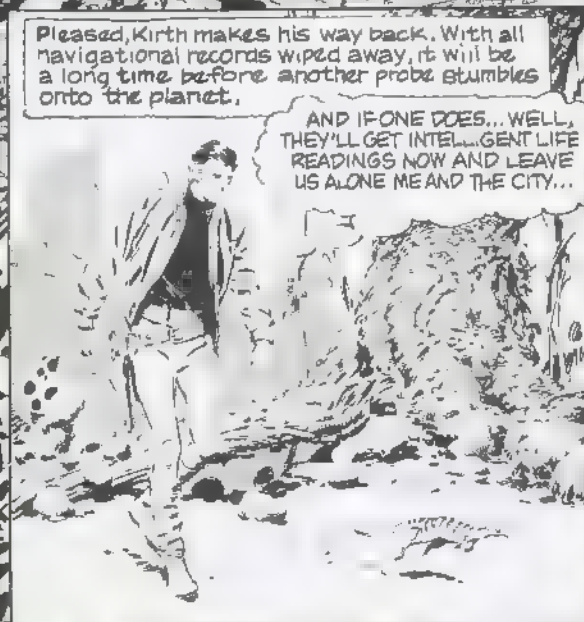
GOOD-BYE,
JAREL. THOSE
INSTRUMENTS YOU'RE
SO FOND OF WILL TAKE
CARE OF YOU AND YOU'LL
BE WELL ON YOUR
WAY TO CORE--

--BEFORE
YOU DISCOVER
HOW MUCH I'VE
TAMPERED
WITH THEM.



Pleased, Kirth makes his way back. With all
navigational records wiped away, it will be
a long time before another probe stumbles
onto the planet.

AND IF ONE DOES... WELL,
THEY'LL GET INTELLIGENT LIFE
READINGS NOW AND LEAVE
US ALONE ME AND THE CITY...



TWO RELICS...
GROWING OLD
TOGETHER.



Kirth enters his new home, hoping that somehow,
somehow perhaps those who created it
can sense or know, though they are gone...
Their city still survives.

Dedicated to the Memory of Ray E. Wrenzel

Fire's Kin.

• A MORRIGAN TALE •

YOUNGER!
COME OUT,
YOUNGER!
I NEED YOUR
EYES!

CHARLES VESS, CLANDESTINE



'BOUT
TIME, OLE
BANGIN'
GUMS, I
BEEN
SUFFOCATIN'
N' NERE.

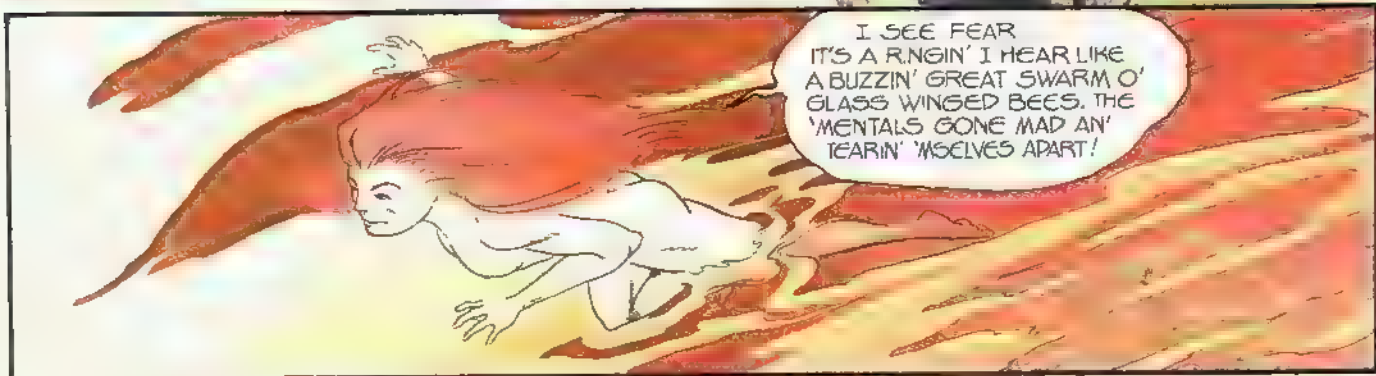
I SMELL
DEATH BLOWING
IN LIKE A BREEZE
OFF A STAGNANT
POND. FLY IN A
CIRCLE AN' SEE
WHAT'S WHAT.



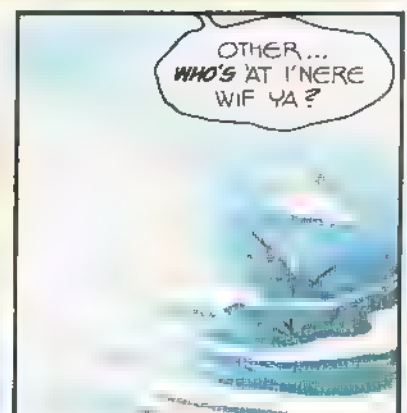
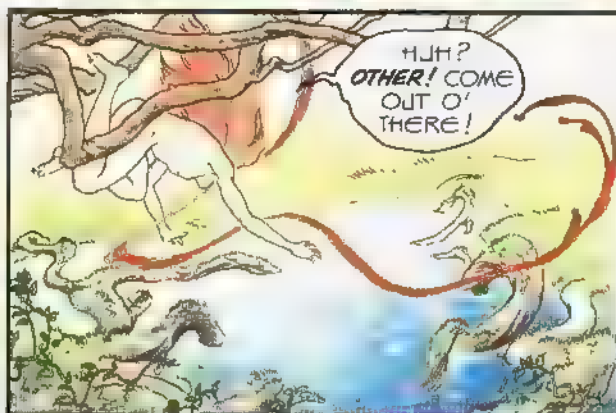
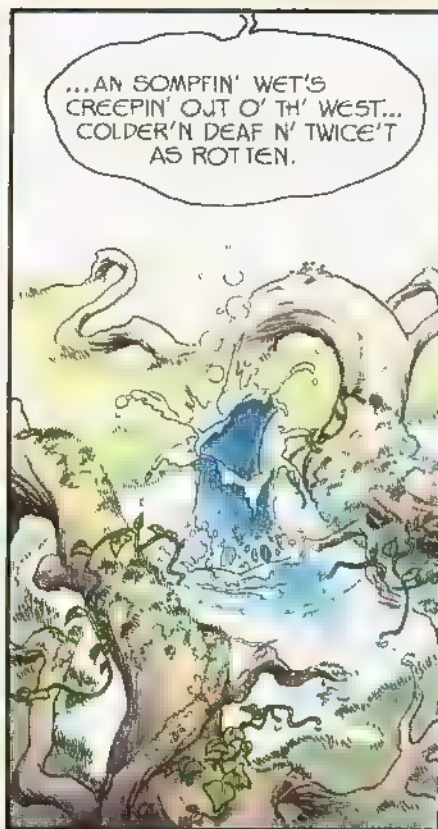
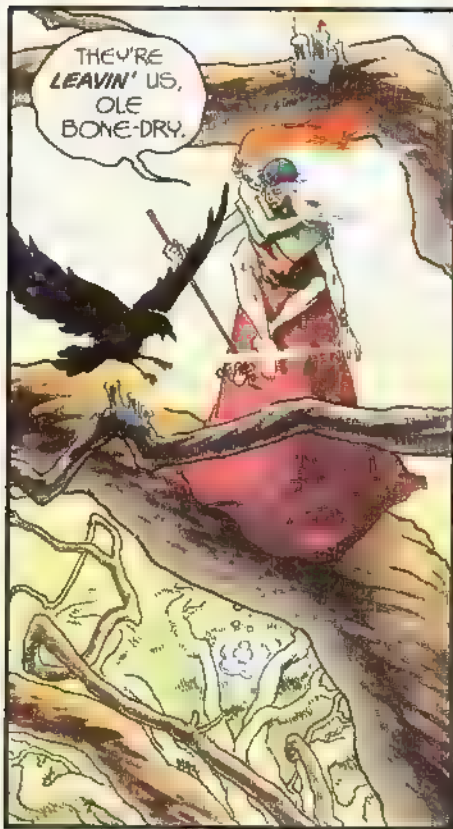
AWRIGHT...
AWRIGHT, JJS KEEP
THAT FLAPPIN' BAG O'
BEAK N FEATHERS
OUTTA M' WAY!

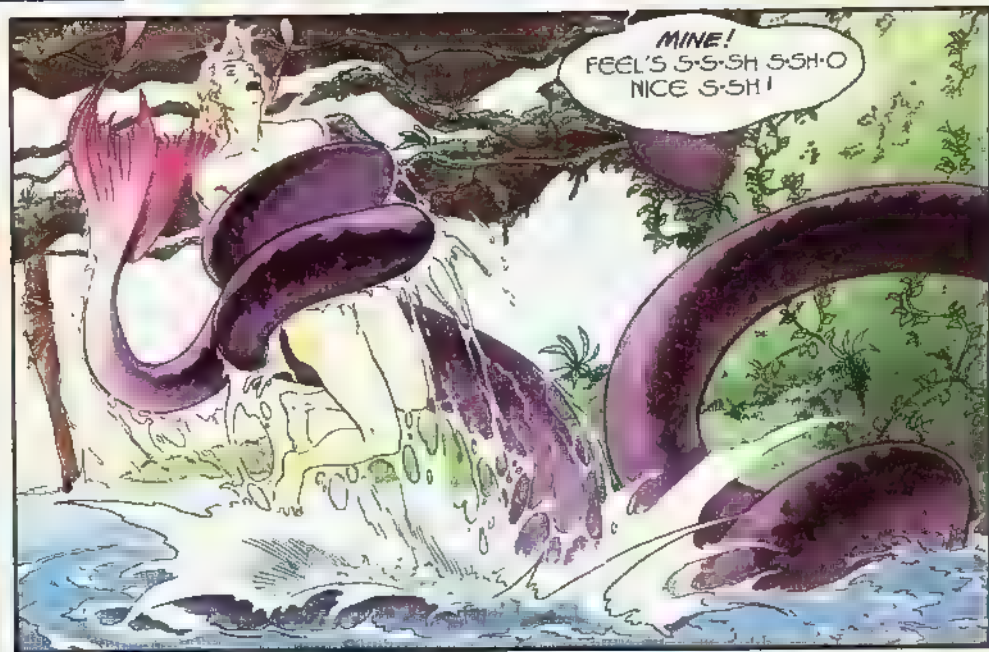
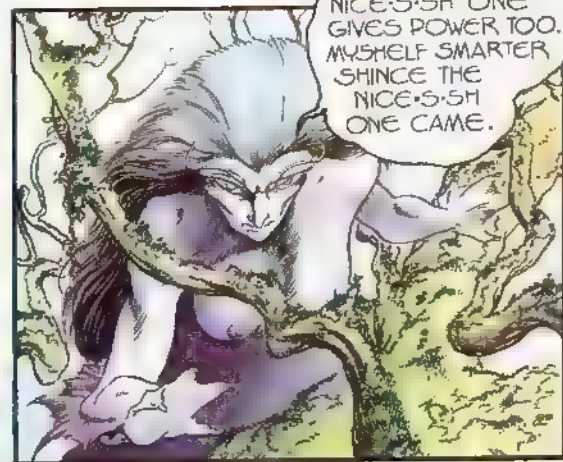


SQUAWK!



I SEE FEAR
IT'S A RINGIN' I HEAR LIKE
A BUZZIN' GREAT SWARM O'
GLASS WINGED BEES. THE
'MENTALS GONE MAD AN'
TEARIN' 'MSELVES APART!



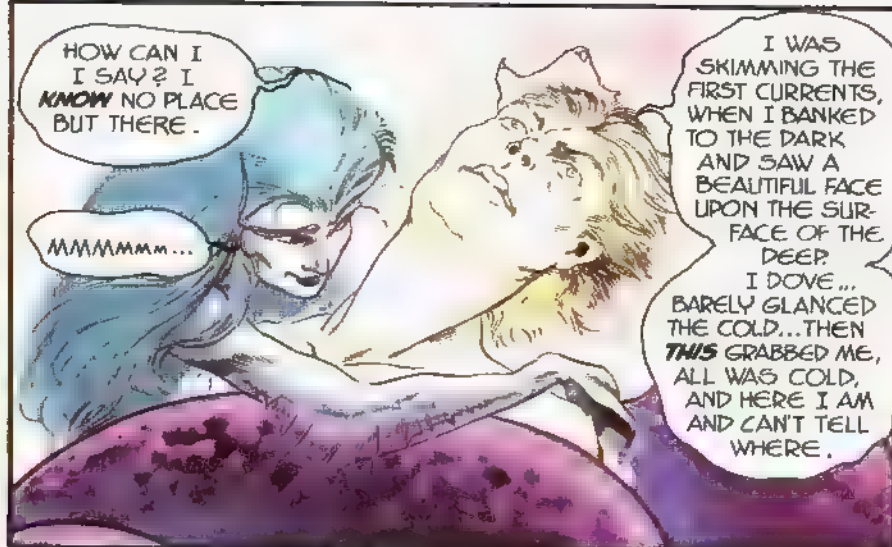


HMMM...? I'D IMAGINE
SO, CAN YOU **SPEAK**,
BOY? WHERE DO
YOU COME FROM?



HOW CAN I
I SAY? I
KNOW NO PLACE
BUT THERE.

MMMMMM...



I WAS
SKIMMING THE
FIRST CURRENTS,
WHEN I BANKED
TO THE DARK
AND SAW A
BEAUTIFUL FACE
UPON THE SUR-
FACE OF THE
DEEP.
I DOVE...
BARELY GLANCED
THE COLD... THEN
THIS GRABBED ME,
ALL WAS COLD,
AND HERE I AM
AND CAN'T TELL
WHERE.

HERE'S
HERE, WHERE
ELSE?



SO...THIS IS
OTHER'S DOING!
LISTEN, WATER, YOU
HAVE TO LET HIM GO!
HE'S KIN TO FIRE
AND **CAN'T** SHARE
PLACE WITH THEM.
THEY'LL DIE, AND SO
WILL **WE**!

MYSELF HATES
.S.SH **FIRE**. FIRE
DIE... WITCHES
.S.SH **DIE**... ALL
DIE, BUT NICE
.S.SH ONE AND
WATER.



SURE OF YOURSELF ARE YA?
WELL, ALL THAT **BURNS**
ISN'T FIRE.
OTHER, YOU LOVESICK
WANTON... OPEN THE GATE
YOU COAXED HIM
THROUGH AND PRE-
PARE TO SEND
HIM BACK.



YOUNGER!
TO THE KILN!
FETCH ME THE
LIVE LIME!

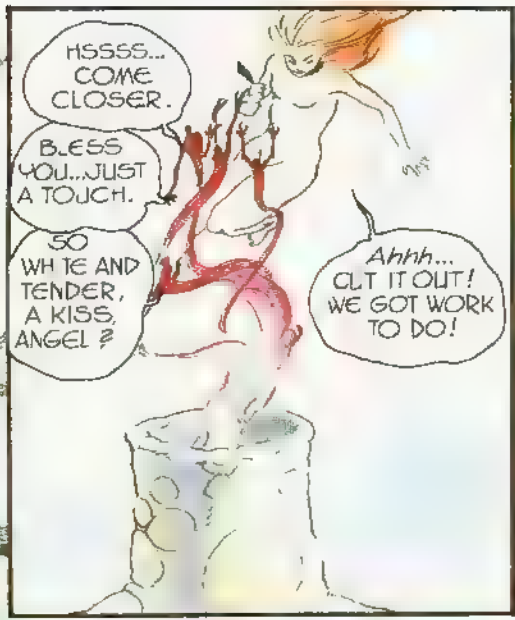


PLUCK

T'ANKS, CROW!



C'MOUT FEL..AS, I NEED YA!

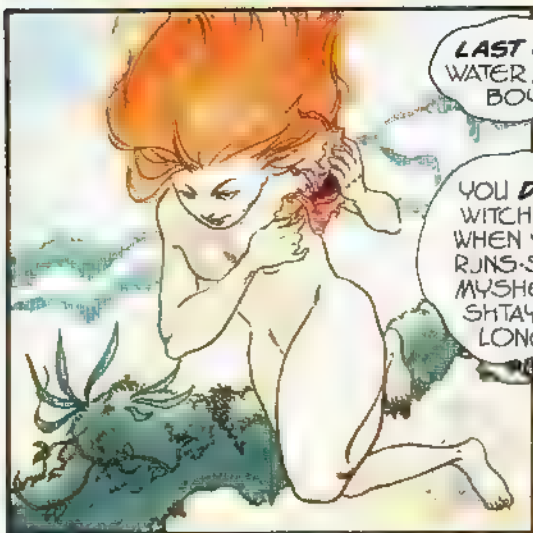


HSSSS... COME CLOSER.

BLESS YOU...JUST A TOUCH.

SO WH TE AND TENDER, A KISS, ANGEL?

Ahhh... CLT IT OUT! WE GOT WORK TO DO!

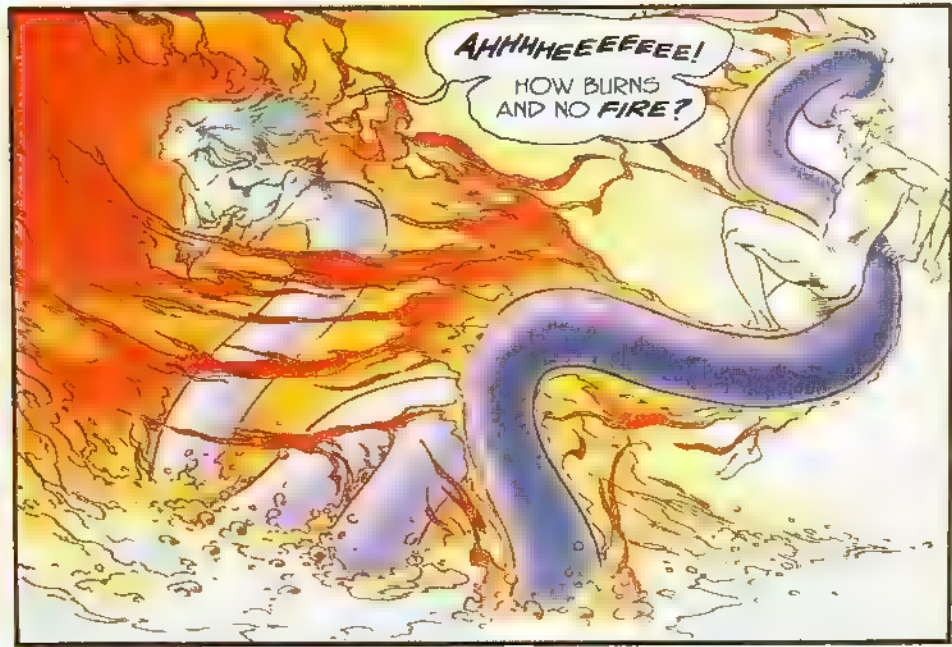
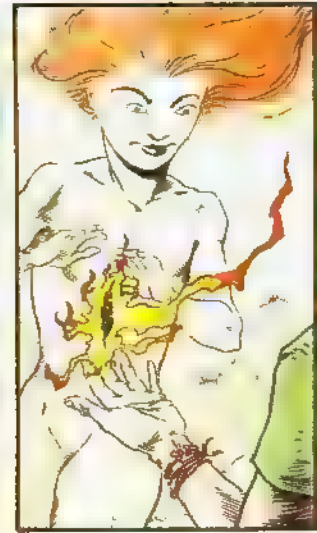


LAST CHANCE, WATER! LET THE BOY GO!

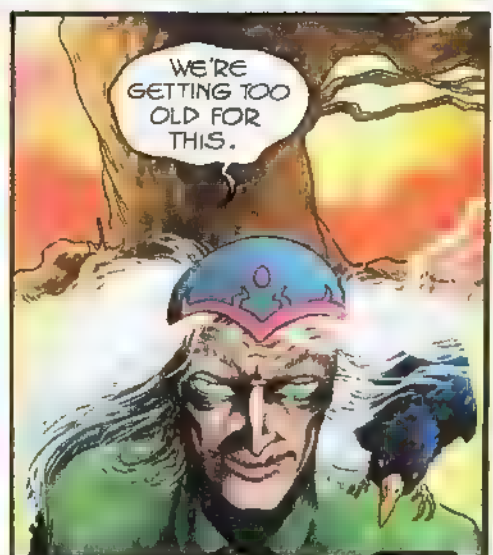
YOU **DIE** FIRSHT, WITCHES-S-SH, WHEN YOUR BLOOD RUNS-S-S COLD. MYSELF CAN SHTAY COLD LONG TIME!



AS LONG AS LIME STAYS **HOT**, WATER?



AHHHHEEEEEE!
HOW BURNS AND NO **FIRE**?



TOADSWART

SYNOPSIS

"What is this Darkness, this consummate Evil pervading all . . . the now forsaken castle chambers . . . the landscapes and villages beyond?" So in the year 982 A.D., from a lonely cell, contemplates the dwarf Toadswart, retainer of Castle Amplestone.

Had it commenced with the mysterious disappearance of the castle's old Lord? Certainly this affected his heir and regent, Prince Waxwroth. Suspecting the country's ruler, the King of the First Dominion, of treacherous designs upon Amplestone province, Waxwroth instituted a policy of oppression and cruel taxation to support a secret defense project.

If the precise beginnings of the Tragedy are vague in Toadswart's memory, not so the relentless events leading to its final act . . . such as the revelation of Waxwroth's secret project. While the rest of Amplestone proceeded with preparations for the investiture of the Prince's son, Rupert — which would also validate Waxwroth as Lord of Amplestone — the Prince locked himself away in the castle depths. There — over the reservations of his Counselor, Bitterburr, and the disdain of the old Lord's magician, Lacknose — Waxwroth used knowledge gained with the wealth brutally wrung from his subjects and called upon Dark Forces to bring to life a huge and hideous creation of rag, filth, and clay.

d'AMPLESTONE

A GOTHIC TALE of HORROR & MAGICK

BY TIM A. CONRAD

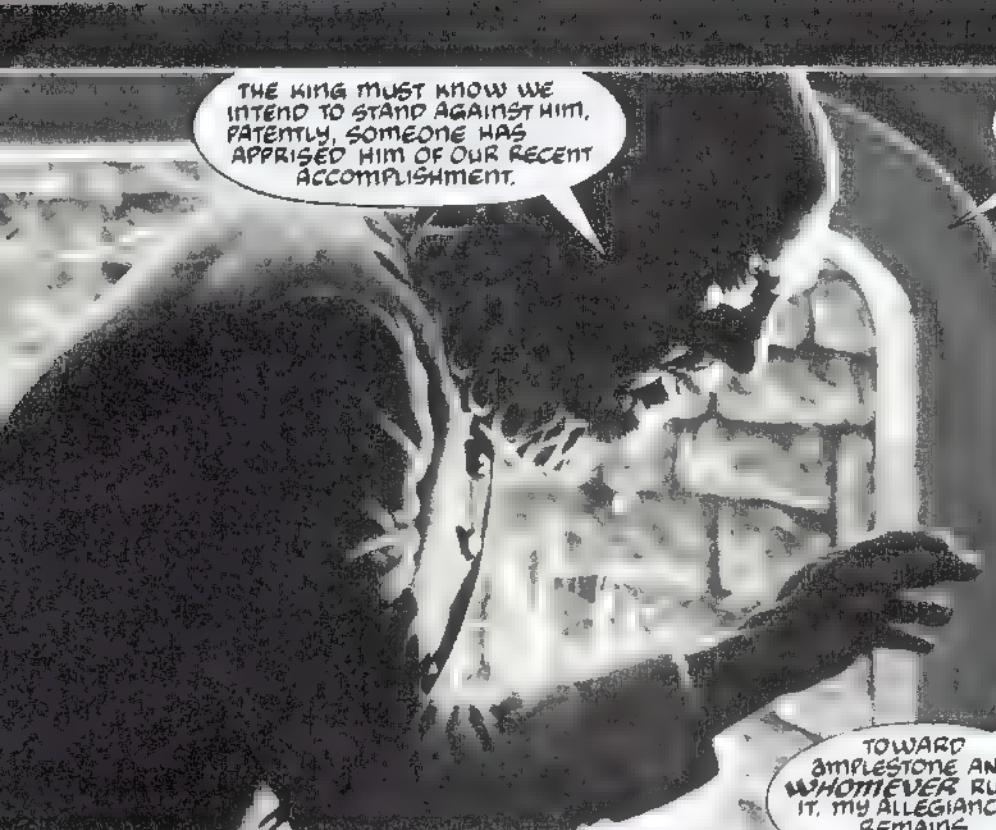
CHAPTER III

AND ALL THE KING'S MEN...

TREASON!
WE ARE
BETRAYED!

'Twas a fortnight following Waxwroth's Unholy Animation of his monstrous Golem-ensconced in a mightily barred and boarded chamber in Amplestone's deepest bowels--when tidings came of the imminent arrival of the King's army.

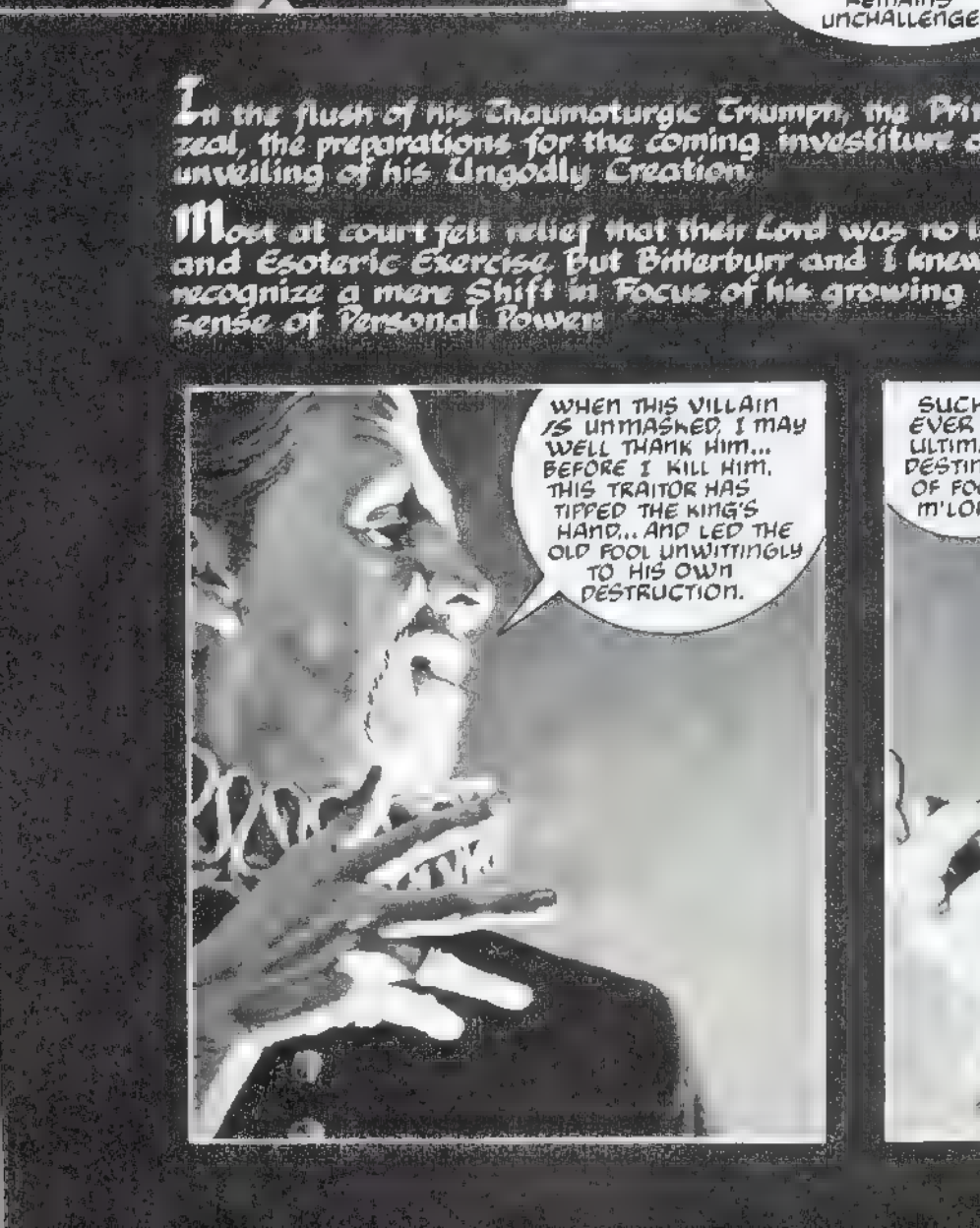




THE KING MUST KNOW WE INTEND TO STAND AGAINST HIM, PATENTLY, SOMEONE HAS APPRISED HIM OF OUR RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENT.



WERE I NOT SURE OF YOUR OWN LOYALTY TO THE MANOR AND MY FATHER-- EVEN IF NOT TO ME--MY SUSPICIONS WOULD FALL HEAVILY--AND FATALLY ON YOU, BITTERBURR.



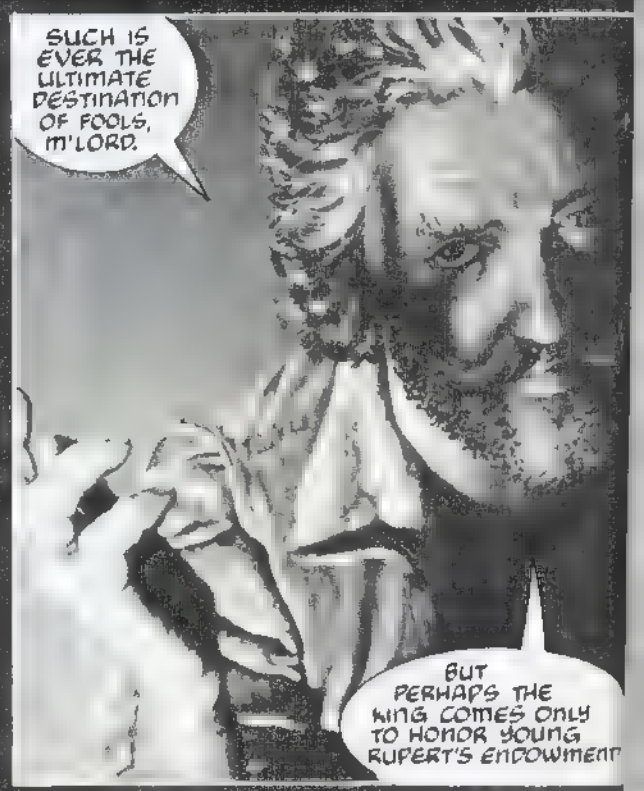
TOWARD AMPLESTONE AND WHOMEVER RULES IT, MY ALLEGIANCE REMAINS UNCHALLENGED.

In the flush of his Chaumaturgic Triumph, the Prince had resumed, with frenzied zeal, the preparations for the coming investiture of his son...and the public unveiling of his Ungodly Creation.

Most at court felt relief that their Lord was no longer lost to Abstract Study and Esoteric Exercise. But Bitterburr and I knew Waxwroth too well not to recognize a mere Shift in Focus of his growing Fanatic Ecstasy in his own sense of Personal Power.

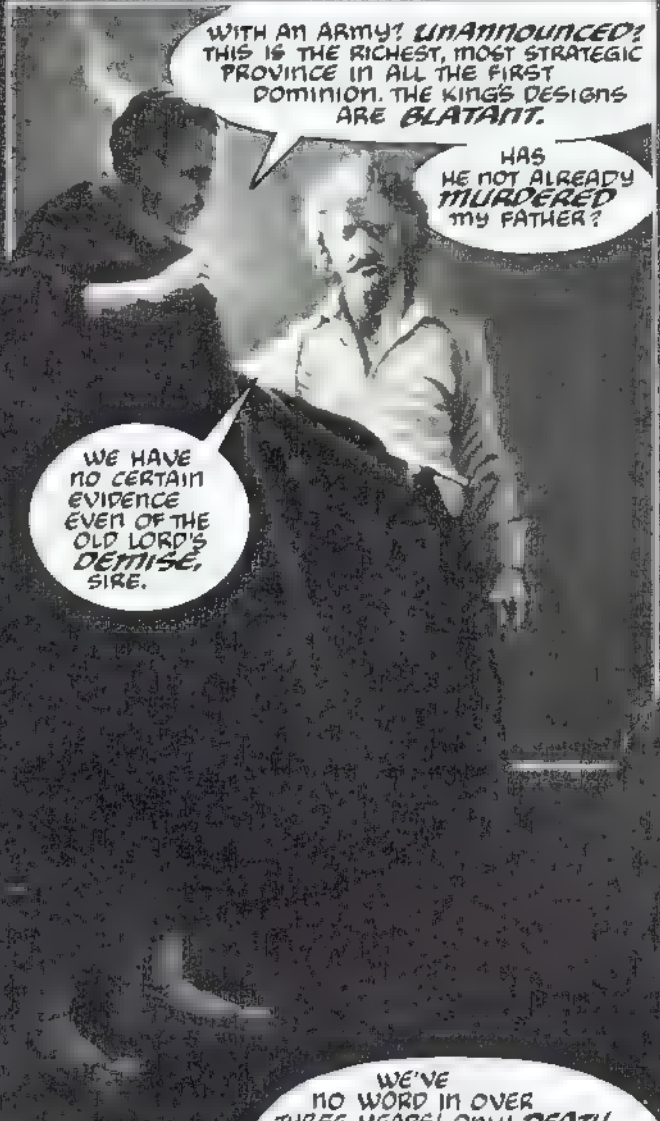


WHEN THIS VILLAIN IS UNMASKED, I MAY WELL THANK HIM... BEFORE I KILL HIM. THIS TRAITOR HAS TIPPED THE KING'S HAND... AND LED THE OLD FOOL UNWITTINGLY TO HIS OWN DESTRUCTION.



SUCH IS EVER THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION OF FOOLS, M'LORD.

BUT PERHAPS THE KING COMES ONLY TO HONOR YOUNG RUPERT'S ENDOWMENT



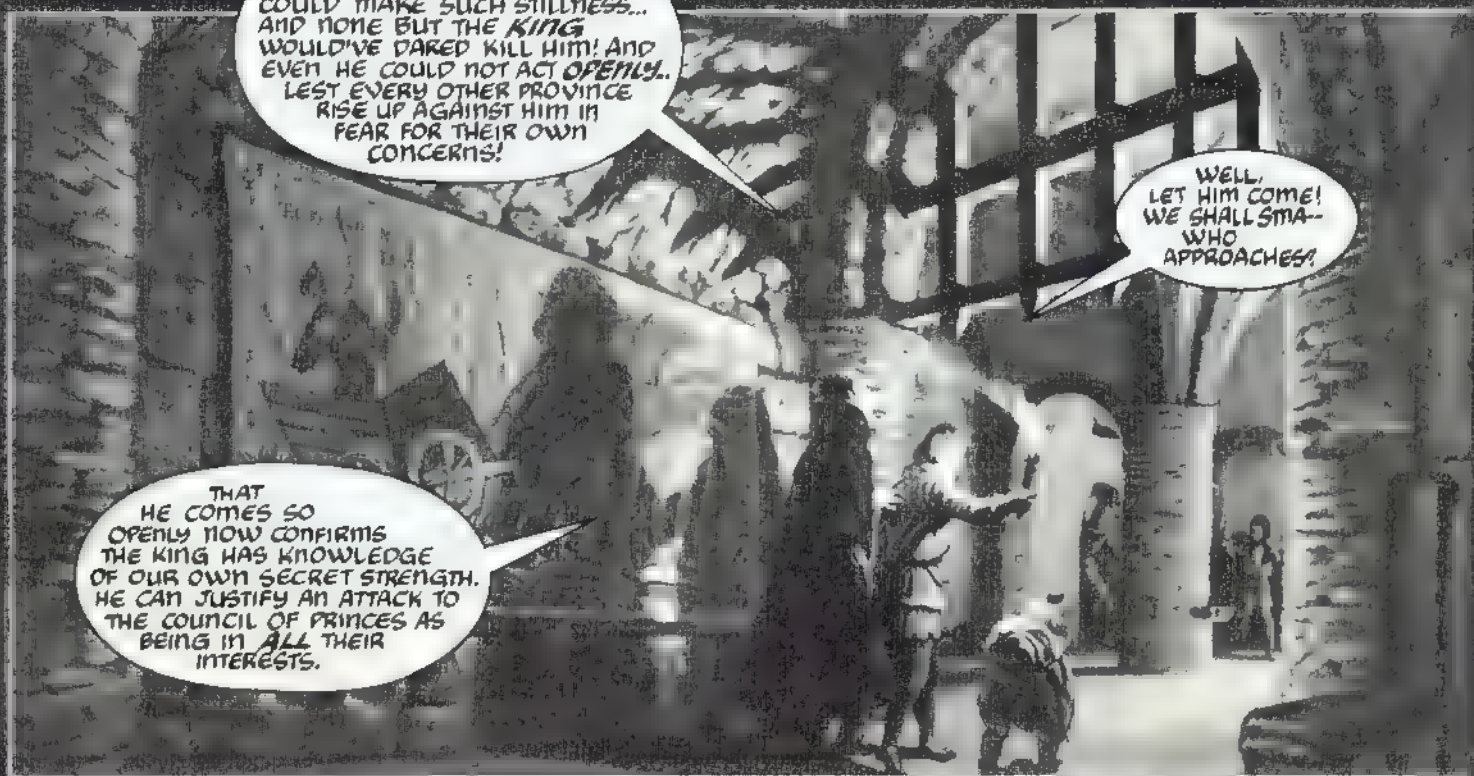
WITH AN ARMY? *UNANNOUNCED!*
THIS IS THE RICHEST, MOST STRATEGIC
PROVINCE IN ALL THE FIRST
DOMINION. THE KING'S DESIGNS
ARE *BLATANT*.

HAS
HE NOT ALREADY
MURDERED
MY FATHER?

WE HAVE
NO CERTAIN
EVIDENCE
EVEN OF THE
OLD LORD'S
DEMISE,
SIRE.



BE NOT
SO GREAT A
FOOL AS
THE KING,
COUNSELOR!



WE'VE
NO WORD IN OVER
THREE YEARS! ONLY *DEATH*
COULD MAKE SUCH STILLNESS...
AND NONE BUT THE *KING*
WOULD'VE DARED KILL HIM! AND
EVEN HE COULD NOT ACT *OPENLY*.
LEST EVERY OTHER PROVINCE
RISE UP AGAINST HIM IN
FEAR FOR THEIR OWN
CONCERNS!

WELL,
LET HIM COME!
WE SHALL SMA--
WHO
APPROACHES?

THAT
HE COMES SO
OPENLY NOW CONFIRMS
THE KING HAS KNOWLEDGE
OF OUR OWN SECRET STRENGTH.
HE CAN JUSTIFY AN ATTACK TO
THE COUNCIL OF PRINCES AS
BEING IN *ALL* THEIR
INTERESTS.

WHAT UNKEMPT KNAVE
IS *THIS* WHO CONDUCTS
HIMSELF AS EQUAL WITH
YOUNG PRINCE
RUPERT?

I REMAIN SHAMSHADOW, LORD.
YOU COMMISSIONED ME TO
RENDER, AS MY ABILITIES ALLOW,
PORTRAITS OF YOUR FAMILY
AND YOURSELF.

HAVING
COMPLETED THE
FIRST THIRD OF
MY CHARGE, I
SEEK OPPORTUNITY
TO CONTINUE.

AS HER
LADYSHIP HAS REFUSED
TO ACKNOWLEDGE MY ENTREATIES
FOR AUDIENCE, I HOPE TO GAIN
AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR
HIGHNESS SO I MIGHT
BEGIN ON THE
CENTERPIECE.

MEANTIME,
PRINCE RUPERT
HAS DEVELOPED AN
INTEREST IN THE
DECORATIVE CRAFT.
SWAYED BY HIS
ENTHUSIASM, I NOW
UNDERTAKE TO
EDUCATE HIM IN
THE ARTS.

TOADSWART
SHALL ACCOMPANY
YOU TO MY WIFE'S CHAMBERS
WITH MY EXPLICIT COMMAND
THAT SHE IMMEDIATELY
ACCEDE TO YOUR
REQUIREMENTS.

I SHALL
NOT, HOWEVER,
TOLERATE MY SON
SQUANDERING HIS
TIME AND EFFORT
ON ANY SUCH
TRIVIAL PURSUITS
AS *HOW* MAY
DEVISE.

RUPERT
WILL SOON BE
HEIR TO ALL OF
AMPLESTONE PROVINCE.
HE MUST **LEARN** TO
TO HOLD IT...AND
FIGHT TO KEEP IT,
AND HIS FIRST GREAT
LESSON APPROACHES,
SOON.

GO, BOY!
PUT **ARTIFICE**
ASIDE AND
EMBRACE THE CRAFT
OF **LIFE!** REPORT
TO CAPTAIN FLURRY
FOR THE MUSTER
OF OUR
TROOPS.

Crestfallen and
dejected, the
young Prince
turned away.

AH...
INNOCENCE
THWARTED,
AS EVER, BY
RESPONSIBILITIES.

The artist's unbidden
aside astonished me.
Not for its content—to
which my heart
conceded—but for the
longing stirred in my
soul for my own lost
youth, despite all its
estrangement and
Pain.

COME BITTERBURR. A
SHARP WORD AND A FIRM
COMMAND SERVE FOR THE
EDIFICATION OF CHILDREN.
WE'VE A MORE SERIOUS
LESSON TO PREPARE."

--FOR
ONE LESS
READILY
ENLIGHTENED.

...and his
confidence in
William's
...regard
...the King's
...ance. As if
...them totally
...to any
vision of
himself
besieged

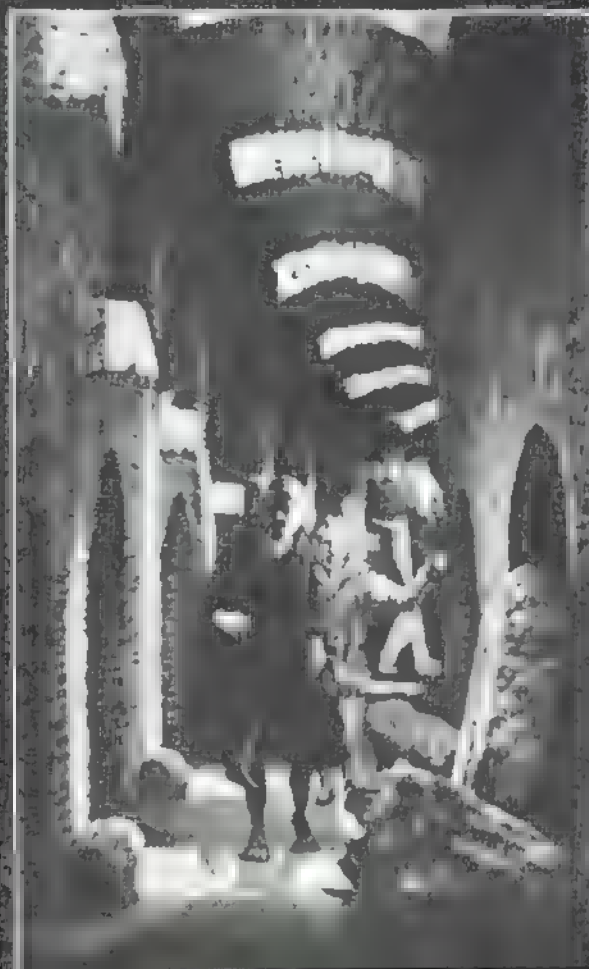
As blind as Captain
Flurry would prove to the
sight of the young Heir
that evening...



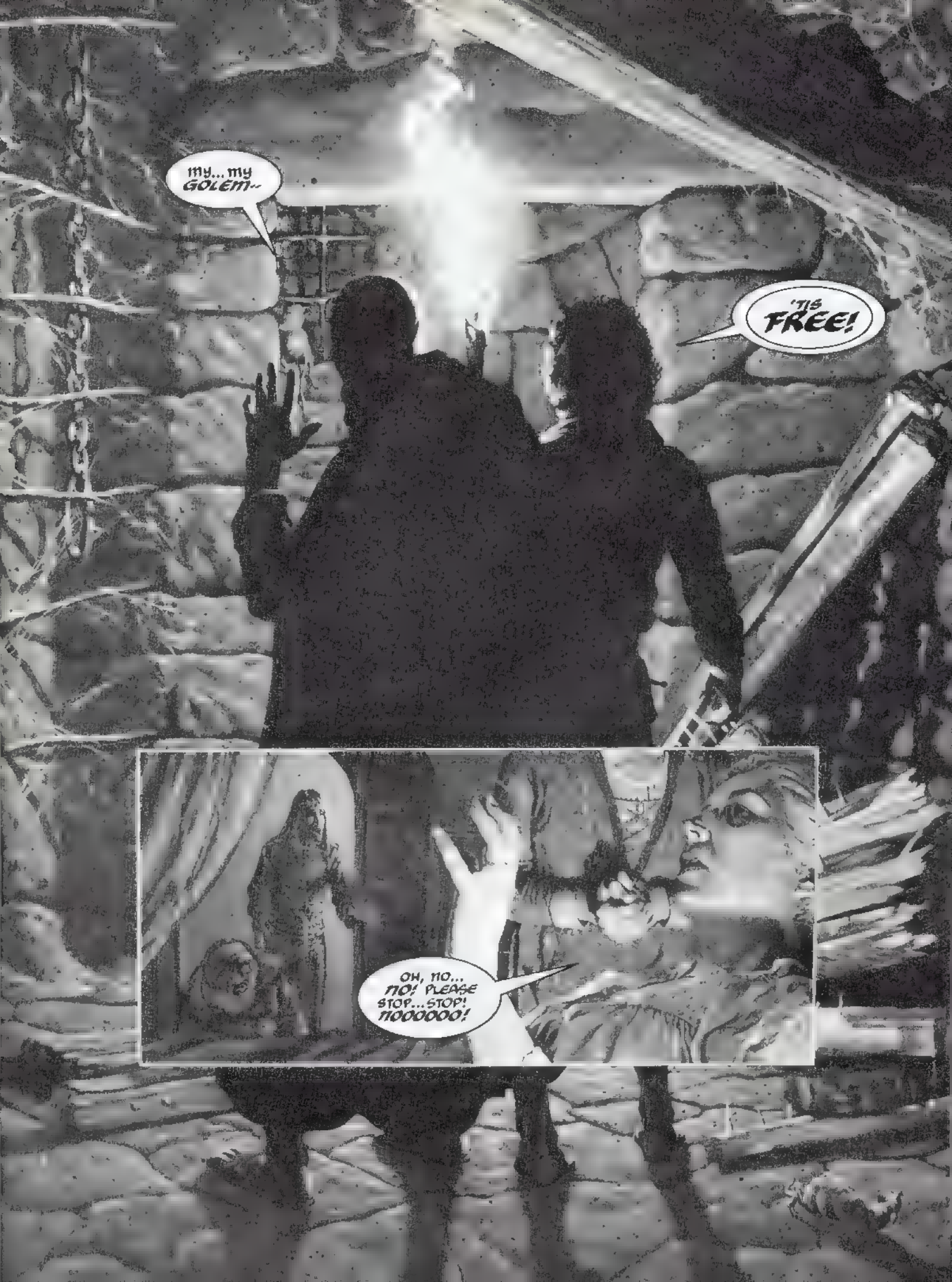
As blind as the
aimless portrait
painter—he who
looked but did not
see—to the Human
Reality beneath
the Opaque
veneer of Position
and Authority
to which he
was thrall.



Waxenroth in his
fervor—like Flurry
in his Ignorance,
and Bitterburr in
his Loyalty—was
lost in his own
Shadow, seeing
nothing but what
that Limited
Gloom
encompassed.



But the inexorable
process had already
begun which would
most glaringly and
tragically illuminate
that Darkness...



my... my
GOLEM--

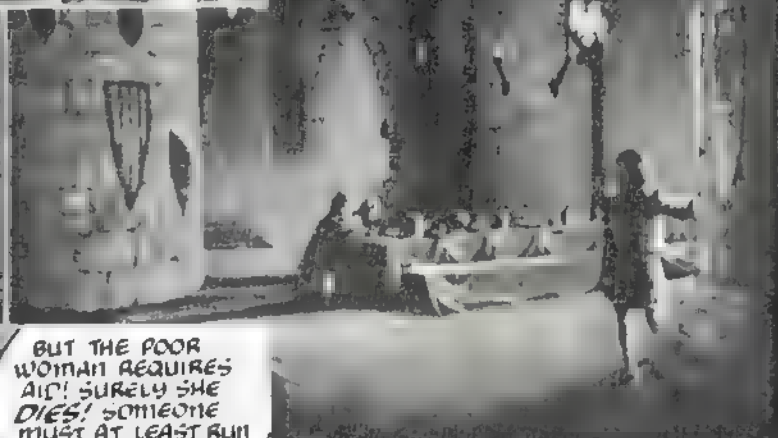
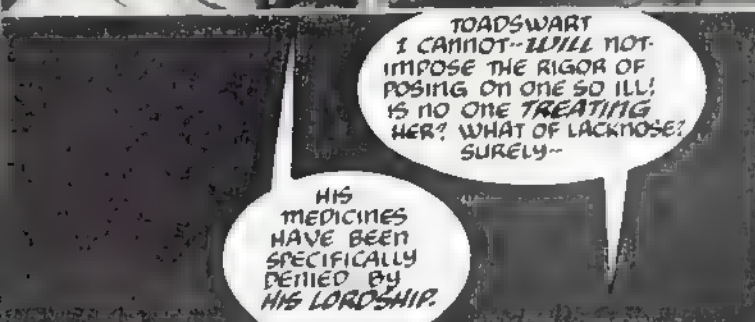
'TIS
FREE!



OH, NO...
**NO! PLEASE
STOP...STOP!
NOOOOOO!**

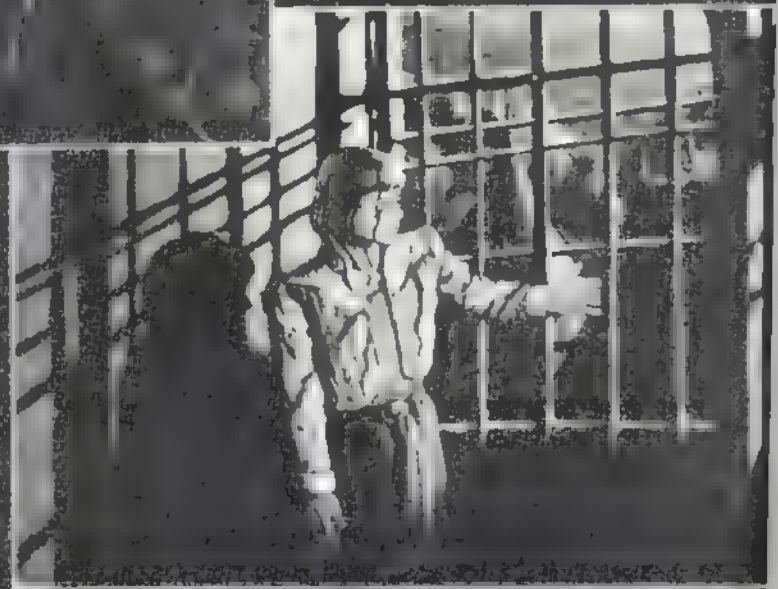


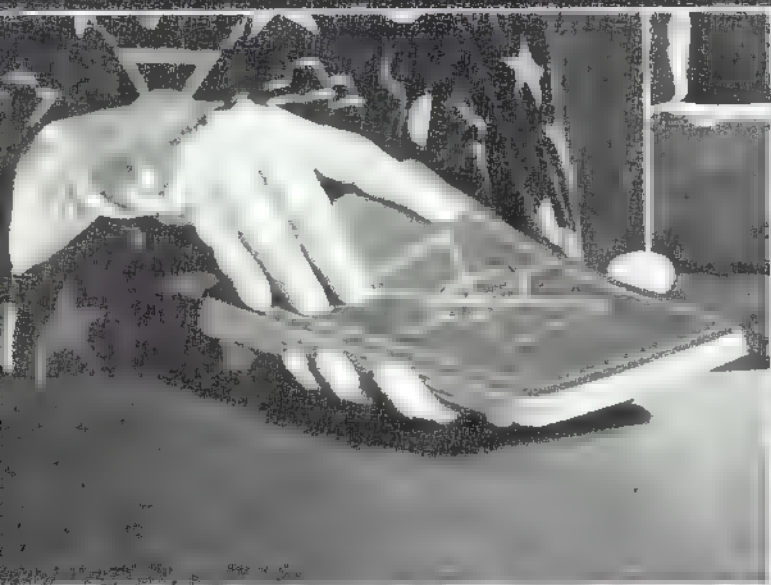
At the same time I asked of myself: how long? Had affliction anything to do with the Esoteric Motives and forces with which her husband toyed?



Princess Adriana had come to Amplestone thirteen years before from Bluewoods Province--herself hardly more than a child--to consummate the marriage and produce the offspring which would unite the two Provinces.

She had fulfilled--as she must--the Duties of Heritage. And she had seemed supremely happy with Motherhood. She had taken ill only as Prince Waxworth became immersed in his Arcane Studies--and to bed almost immediately following his success with the Golem.



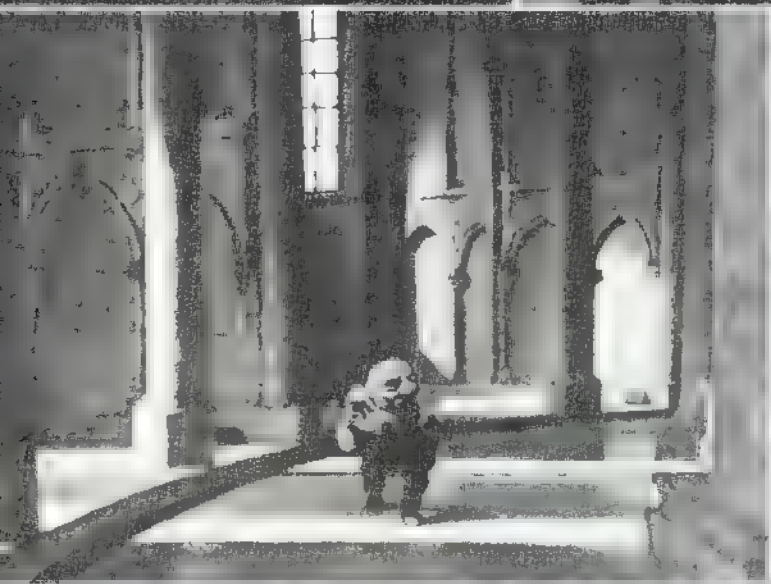


Before Waxwroth prohibited such Ministrations, the magician Lacknose had concocted some Soothing Potions, though he exhibited Small Confidence in their Efficacy, muttering and fretting about "Maladies of Spirit" and "Encroachment on Vital Forces."

As I hastened to the rectory, an Uncomfortable Unease settled upon me. For the first time I began to sense some Underlying Connection permeating events in Amplestone.



I but caught the faintest Glimmer-- if not Understanding, at least a Perception-- that what Waxwroth had fashioned somehow included and influenced us all.



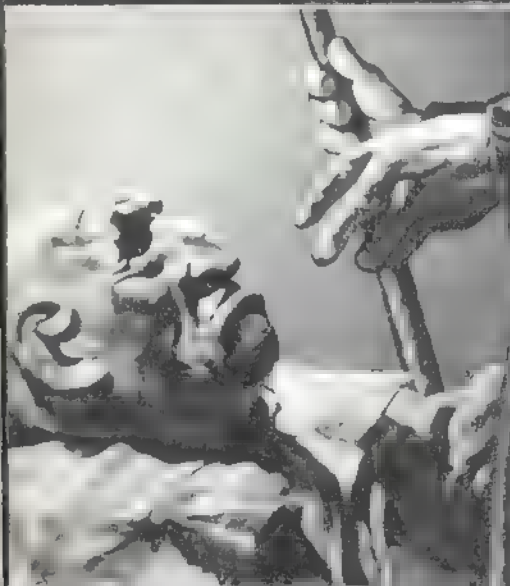
Thus my fate was born: Were the Vital Powers the Black Prince Forged and Wielded entirely his to command?





If those Forces existed beyond himself—as I was beginning to suspect—while his Vision was yet confined to his Own Concerns, then he as well as all around him would be in Mortal Danger.

And if such travail should come, to whom could we turn for Succor?



Surely not Father Pretense. He would see in these Perils the Hand of his Devil and Just Retribution for Sin, but have nothing to offer in Defense save Ritual and Dogma.

Bitterburr and Captain Flurry—even if they could reach beyond their loyalty to the Oak of Amplestone—lacked, as did I, the requisite Understanding of the Situation and its Causes.





Only Lacknose—himself
an Adept of these Arts—
would know what
Currents and Eddies
our Lord Waxwroth's
Arcane Endeavors
might impel.



This Torrent of Fear
suddenly surging
through me... This
Rising Tide of
Helplessness and
Doubt that threatened
to become a Deluge of
Death.

...could the
Old Mystic
dam that
flooded





Even as the Priest and I quickened through corridor and courtyard, these anxieties engulfed and overwhelmed me. I was filled to bursting with emotions and notions not mine alone.



That first faint Glimmer of Dire Suspicion had become a blinding Light of Desperate Terror. In that Stark Illumination I briefly but clearly comprehended all of the awful Wrath and Horror raging uncontrolled about us.



When a trio of Dependent Scenarios



...an Exclamation
of Shock and Pain.

LOOK!

...a helplessly
hurtling body...

...and a rustling flutter
of wings...

...plunged
my soul into a
Darkness deeper and
blackier than any I
had ever known.

next: **ASHES TO ASHES**

THE LAST GALACTUS STORY

CHAPTER TWO: THE SHADOWS IN THE STONE

THE HEAVY AIR IS STALE AND FLAT, AND NO SWEET SCENTS OF GROWING THINGS FLOAT ON ITS SULLEN BREEZES.

THE DANCE OF DRIFTING DUST IS SLOW, DESCRIBING IN THE DARKNESS ANCIENT PATTERNS THAT SPEAK OF VAST AGE AND LONG YEARS UNDISTURBED.

THE COLD, COSMIC FIRE OF THE WOMAN CALLED NOVA DOES LITTLE TO ROLL BACK THE BOUNDARIES OF DARKNESS THAT ROIL AND FLOW ABOUT HER LIKE LIVING THINGS.

SHE CAME TO THIS DEAD, DARK PLACE IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS PERHAPS SHE HAS FOUND THEM.

SPEAKER STONES OR
SOMETHING VERY MUCH
LIKE THEM I'VE SEEN
THEIR COUSINS ON A
HUNDRED DISTANT
WORLDS

BUT, NORMALLY THEY
REPRESENT A DIFFERENT
CULTURE, A VERY
DIFFERENT CULTURE
FROM THE ONE LYING
IN RUINS OUTSIDE
THIS HIDDEN
CHAMBER.

THE SOCIETY AND
TECHNOLOGY THAT CREATED
ALL THOSE SPACE SHIPS
OUT ON THE SURFACE
WOULD SEEM UNLIKELY
TO HAVE TAKEN THE
TURNS NECESSARY TO
THE DEVELOPMENT OF
SUCH STONES.

THIS CHAMBER IS AT LEAST
AS OLD AS THE OTHER
ARTIFACTS I'VE SEEN
THE DUST HAS BEEN
GATHERING HERE
FOR EONS

THAT MAY BE PART OF THE
ANSWER WHOEVER SET
THESE STONES EXPECTED
IT TO BE A LONG TIME
BEFORE THEY WERE
SEEN AGAIN.

THEY SELECTED SPEAKER-STONE
TECHNOLOGY TO CARRY THEIR
MESSAGE BECAUSE THE PSYCHIC
IMAGERY OF THE STONES' FUNC-
TIONS AS A UNIVERSAL
LANGUAGE.

GENTLE AS A MOTHER BRUSHING
ERRANT STRANDS OF HAIR FROM THE
BROW OF HER SLEEPING BABE
NOVA'S GOLD-SHEATHED FINGERS
CARESS THE ANCIENT STONES

LIKE THE GHOSTLY
CHANTINGS OF LONG
DEAD HOLY MEN, THE
DISTANT BUBBLE OF
VOICES TICKLES AT
HER SENSES, ALREADY
HEIGHTENED FAR
BEYOND THE PALTRY
HUMAN LEVELS AT
WHICH SHE FIRST
PERCEIVED THE UNI-
VERSE, SO LONG AGO.

A MURMUR
RISES

DEEP WITHIN THE
STRANGE, TRANS-
LUCENT STONES
SHADOWS BESTIR
THEMSELVES...



SHADOWS THAT REACH OUT AND TOUCH
HER MIND, TO UNFOLD IMAGES LIKE
MEMORIES LONG FORGOTTEN.



A RACE WHOSE MOST REMOTE
ANCESTORS HAD LEARNED TO
UNLOCK THE PRISON OF THE
BRAIN, AND SET FREE THE
MIND.

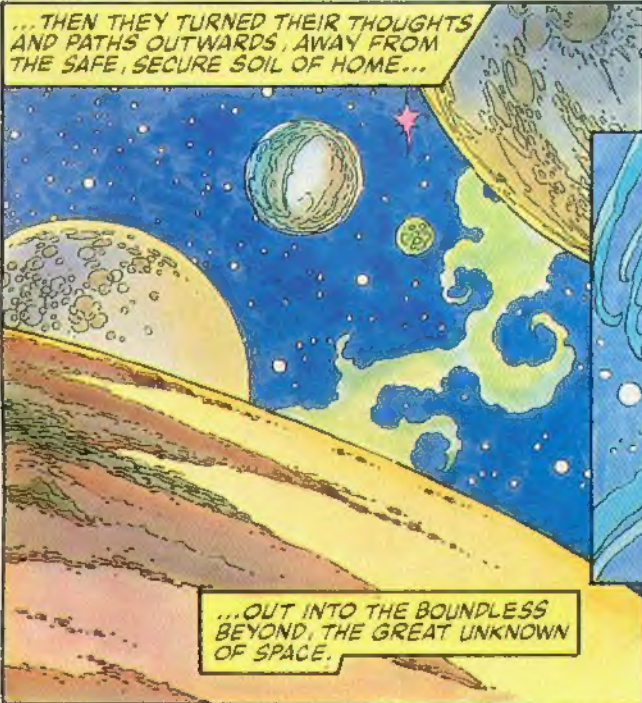
NOT TRUE MEMORIES, THESE, FOR
THEY BELONG TO A RACE LONG
DEAD, A RACE NOT HUMAN.

OUT OF SUCH FREEDOM HAD
GROWN A CULTURE OF PEACE
AND ABSOLUTE HARMONY.



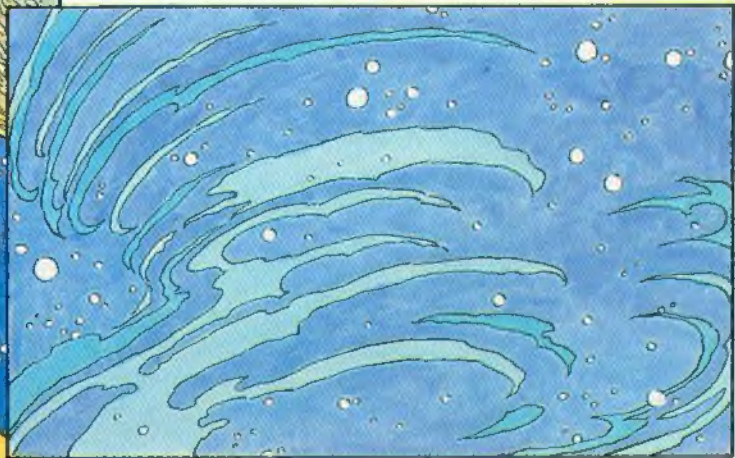
THEIR BODIES SAFELY TENDED TO BY
THEIR AUTOMATED SYSTEMS ON THE
HOMEWORLD THEY LET THEIR UNEN-
CUMBERED MINDS DRIFT OUT...

...FIRST ACROSS THEIR PLANET,
TILL EVERY HIDDEN NOOK AND
CRANNY HAD BEEN EXPLORED...



...THEN THEY TURNED THEIR THOUGHTS
AND PATHS OUTWARDS, AWAY FROM
THE SAFE, SECURE SOIL OF HOME...

...OUT INTO THE BOUNDLESS
BEYOND, THE GREAT UNKNOWN
OF SPACE.



AND THERE, WITHIN THE DARK, SWIRLING NEBULAE
OF THE GALACTIC CORE THEY FOUND THE TERRIBLE
SECRET, HIDDEN FOR UNTOLD MILLENNIA...

SHOCK? TERROR? SUCH WORDS HAVE NO MEANING. THE PEACEFUL STAR-SPANNING RACE HAD BEEN SHOWN THE FACE OF THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION.

THEY SOUGHT AN AVENUE, ANY AVENUE OF ESCAPE. THEY TURNED THEIR MINDS FROM ART AND BEAUTY.

ALMOST OVERNIGHT THEY BECAME SCIENTISTS, ENGINEERS, DESIGNERS. THEY RAPED THEIR WORLD, THEIR SOLAR SYSTEM, GOUGING OUT THE MATERIALS THEY NEEDED.

ACROSS THE GOLDEN PLAINS OF THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE A GREAT, GLEAMING SPACEPORT GREW, SPREADING ITS METAL TENDRILS THROUGH ROCK AND SKY ALIKE.

TWENTY MILLION SHIPS, THEY BUILT. ENOUGH TO HOUSE THE ENTIRE LIVING POPULATION OF THEIR WORLD. EVERY LIVING CREATURE THAT FLOATED, FLEW, CRAWLED, WALKED OR SWAM ACROSS THE PLANET'S SURFACES.

IT WAS A TASK UNEQUALLED IN ALL GALACTIC HISTORY.

A TASK, BY ITS VERY NATURE, ITS VERY MAGNITUDE, DOOMED TO FAILURE.

QUITE SIMPLY, IN TRYING TO SALVAGE ALL, THEY RAN OUT OF TIME, AND SALVAGED NOTHING.

THEY WERE... **TAKEN!** I CAN FEEL IT! I CAN FEEL THE TERRIBLE, SOUL-WRENCHING LURCH OF BEING SUDDENLY WHISKED AWAY, EVERY LIVING, SENTIENT BEING SNATCHED OFF THE PLANET!

BUT... WHO? WHAT? HOW COULD SUCH A THING BE DONE? AND WHY DID THEY EXPEND SO MUCH ENERGY TO RUN AWAY FROM IT? SO MUCH TIME AND EFFORT DEVOTED TO TRYING TO DO THEMSELVES WHAT WAS EVENTUALLY DONE TO THEM...?



IT IS THE BAREST
TELEPATHIC TOUCH
AGAINST HER MIND...

BUT IT EXPLODES
HER FROM THE
FALLEN SPACE-
PORT, FROM THE
THE PLANET,
FROM THE VERY
GALAXY.

OUT INTO THE COLD,
DARK EMPTINESS OF
INTERGALACTIC
SPACE SHE FLIES,
WARPING TIME AND
REALITY ABOUT HER...

UNTIL THE
SHIP IS
NEAR.

A VESSEL SURELY FAR
BEYOND MERE MORTAL
COMPREHENSION. BORN
OF A SCIENCE OLDER
THAN HUMANKIND OLDER
THAN LOST EARTH, THAN
THE VERY UNIVERSE ITSELF.

HIS SHIP.

AND HE IS
GALACTUS.

DEVOURER OF WORLDS! HARBINGER OF
ULTIMATE DOOM! HIS MANLIKE FORM
IS ONLY IN HER EYES.

FOR HIS TRUE SHAPE IS
UNGUessed AND UNGUess-
ABLE. HE IS A LIVING
FORCE OF NATURE.

NOVA IS
HERE, O MASTER.
I HAVE HEARD
YOUR CALL AND
STAND READY TO
DO YOUR
BIDDING.

THEN HEED
WELL MY WORDS,
MOST LOYAL OF
MY HERALDS.

THE SHATTERED
GALAXY FROM WHICH
YOU HAVE RETURNED IS
NOT UNIQUE! THE LONG
RANGE SCANNERS WITH-
IN THIS SHIP DETECT A
VAST PROCESSION OF
SUCH DESTRUCTION,
REACHING HALFWAY
ACROSS THE
UNIVERSE.

IT BEGINS
QUITE NEAR THE
POINT OF UNIVERSAL
ORIGIN, AND ENDS AT
YOUR LONG SINCE
DEPARTED FORMER
HOME.

THE GALAXY
MEN ONCE CALLED
THE MILKY
WAY!

THE LAST GALACTUS STORY CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE